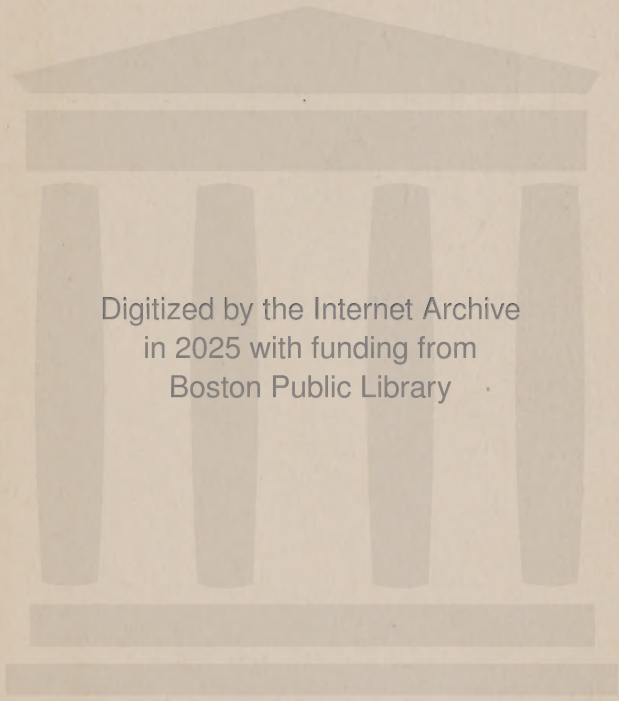
CLOSED DOORS

MARGARET PRESCOTT MONTAGUE

REFERENCE LIBRARY * HOUGHTON MIFFLIN CO. * BOSTON, MASS.
Archive
Collection

This book may not leave the Offices
and if borrowed must be returned within 7 days


Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2025 with funding from
Boston Public Library

https://archive.org/details/closeddoorsstudi00mont_0

By Margaret Prescott Montague

CLOSED DOORS.

LINDA. With frontispiece

HOUGHTON MIFFLIN COMPANY
BOSTON AND NEW YORK

CLOSED DOORS

CLOSED DOORS

STUDIES OF DEAF AND BLIND CHILDREN

BY

Margaret Prescott Montague

BOSTON AND NEW YORK
HOUGHTON MIFFLIN COMPANY
The Riverside Press Cambridge
1915

COPYRIGHT, 1915, BY MARGARET PRESCOTT MONTAGUE

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

Published October 1915

TO

HARRIET CARY MONTAGUE

AND

MALINDA MONTAGUE CAPERTON

THESE STORIES
ARE AFFECTIONATELY DEDICATED
BY THEIR GODMOTHER

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION ix

I. WHY IT WAS W-ON-THE-EYES 1

II. CAIN, THE KEY 21

III. RED BIRD, HE CAN SEE 48

IV. THE LITTLE SIGN FOR FRIEND 78

V. SOMETHING BIG, LIKE RED BIRD 105

VI. WHAT MR. GREY SAID 133

VII. MARKED FOR THE UNEXPECTED 155

INTRODUCTION

SOME of the best writing that has come out of America has dealt with our "local color," that is, with the quaint and fascinating disguises assumed by our elemental human nature as it costumes itself to fit the parts for which it is cast in Alaskan mining camps, in New England back farms or on a Californian wheat ranch.

Miss Montague writes of children growing up in a peculiar spiritual climate, of minds that win subsistence on a barren soil, of customs shared only by an inconsiderable and obscure fraction of humanity. She describes the friendships and adventures of blind children and deaf children at a state school. And because she has the power to see and construct and is in no mood to photograph or to complain, she finds the essential drama of the human soul still bravely enacted behind blind eyes and deaf ears.

Like Helen Keller, she pictures that heroic economy of the blind whereby some of them live happily on the remnants of experience which we normal people waste or throw away. Like W. E. Henley, whose Hospital Sketches are the lineal forefather of Miss Montague's contributions to the literature of the handicapped, she makes us see in these exquisite and touching stories how disease sometimes brings out what is fresh and original, new colors as well as new strengths in character.

Truth is what I feel especially in Miss Montague's stories. Though they spring out of a peculiarly intimate and sympathetic knowledge of a School for the Blind and the Deaf, they err neither by literalism nor by sentimentality. The busy life she draws has a current and a vigor that seem to establish a new standard, — not so much lower than ours as different. She lets us see how deaf children build up new imagery and develop a naming power really poetic. Over her shoulder we watch the unconquerable human soul building its nest and

finding its food even in the dark and silent country which she has chosen to describe.

But her artistry involves no attempted neutrality on vital issues. She flies her own flag because her faith is too strong to hide its colors. She has won it in the struggle with adversity and maintains it, sunny and undaunted, through the saddest pages of her stories. She will make strong friends among her readers.

RICHARD C. CABOT.

CLOSED DOORS

I

WHY IT WAS W–ON–THE–EYES

I WONDER why the children's sign for little old Webster should be W-on-the-eyes," Miss Evans speculated. "There 's nothing peculiar about his eyes, except perhaps that they 're the brightest pair in school."

Miss Evans was the new oral teacher in the Lomax Schools for deaf and blind children, and she was speaking of Charlie Webster, one of the small deaf boys in her class.

That was his sign, W, made in the manual alphabet, with the hand placed against the eyes. Everybody in the deaf department at Lomax had his or her special sign, thus saving the time and trouble of spelling out the whole name on the fingers.

Clarence Chester, the big deaf boy who had finished school, but still stayed on working in the shoe-shop, was the one who made up the signs for the new pupils and teachers. He was rather proud of his talents in this direction, and took the pains of an artist over every sign. They were usually composed of the initial letter of the person's last name placed somewhere on the body, to indicate either some physical peculiarity, or else the position held by that person in the school. Mr. Lincoln, for instance, who was the superintendent, had L-on-the-forehead, to show that he was the head of the whole school, and no one else, of course, could have L as high up as that — not even Mrs. Lincoln. She had to be contented with L-on-the-cheek. So, in the same way, Miss Thompson, who was the trained nurse, had T-on-the-wrist, because it was her business to feel the children's pulses.

When Miss Stedman, the new matron for the deaf boys, came, she should have had S-on-the-chest, as Clarence made a habit of placing all the matrons' initials on their

chests; but unfortunately, S in the manual alphabet is made by doubling up the fist, and Clarence explained to her that if a boy hits himself on the chest with his fist he is sure to hit that middle button of his shirt, and make a bruise. He had to make this rather complicated explanation in writing because Miss Stedman was new to the sign-language and finger-spelling, and he had received his education at Lomax before articulation was taken up there, and was therefore, of course, a mute. So, on account of the button, S-on-the-chest had to be abandoned. But Clarence looked at Miss Stedman, and, for all that they called her a matron, she was very young and small, and had delicately rosy cheeks, so he smiled a little, and then made the letter S and the sign for pretty. And Miss Stedman went away quite satisfied, and showed every one her sign, being innocently unaware that every time she did so she was announcing that she was pretty. When her education in the sign-language had progressed sufficiently for her to discover the real meaning of her sign

she was overcome with confusion, and begged Clarence to change it. But he said he never (*never!* NEVER! made vehemently with his hand) changed a sign after it was once given; besides, by that time all Miss Stedman's little deaf boys had got hold of it and no power on earth could have detached it from their fingers.

But, to go back to Charlie Webster, as Miss Evans remarked, there was nothing peculiar about his eyes, and therefore why his sign should be W-on-the-eyes, caused some small curiosity, but not enough to make any of the teachers or matrons take the trouble to look into the matter. Among themselves, of course, they did not speak of him as W-on-the-eyes: they called him Webster, or Charlie Webster, or most of all, perhaps, "little old Webster," because he was only nine, and everybody on the place adored him.

They may have adored him for that enchanting smile of his, a smile which curved his ridiculously eager little mouth, flooded from his dancing eyes, and generally radi-

ated from the whole expressive little face of him. Or, perhaps, it was because he was so affectionate; or again it might have been because he was so handsome, so alert and gay, and always, moreover, appeared to be having such a good time. Whatever came little old Webster's way seemed always to be the most exciting and delightful thing that had ever happened to him, and whether it was a game to be played, a lesson to be learned, or a person to be loved, he did it with all his might, and with all his heart. Perhaps, after all, the real reason for the world's adoring him was that old classical one for the lamb's devotion to Mary, — he loved the world.

Another thing which sorted him out somewhat from among the other sixty or seventy deaf boys of the school was his fondness for the blind children. It is impossible to imagine any two sets of persons so absolutely shut off from one another as blind people and deaf mutes. It is only through the sense of feeling that they can meet; and for the most part at Lomax, sixty blind children, and

more than a hundred deaf ones, move about through the same buildings, eat in the same dining-room, and, to some extent, play in the same grounds, with almost no intercourse or knowledge of one another. They move upon different planes. The deaf child's plane is made up of things seen, the blind child's of things heard. It is only in things touched that their paths ever cross, and surely only the economy and lack of imagination of the past could have crowded two such alien classes into one establishment. But little old Webster had built a bridge of his own over these almost insurmountable barriers, and through the medium of touch had carried his adventures in friendship even into the country of the blind.

Some of the blind boys knew the manual alphabet and could talk to him on their fingers, and by feeling of his hands could understand what he said to them; but with most he had to be satisfied with merely putting his arm about their shoulders and grunting a soft little inarticulate "Ough, ough!" which was no word at all, of course,

merely an engaging little expression of his friendship and general good feeling. The blind children recognized him by these little grunts, and accepted things from him which they would never have tolerated from any of the other "dummies," as they called the deaf mutes. Webster was their passionate champion on all occasions. Once, when a deaf boy threw a stone which by accident hit one of the blind boys on the forehead, inflicting a bad cut, Webster flew into a wild fury of rage, and attacked the deaf boy with all the passion of his nine years. Afterwards, he tore up to the hospital where his blind friend was having the cut dressed, and snuggling his face against him grunted many soft "oughs, oughs," of sympathy. But the little deaf boy he had thrashed had to come to the hospital to be tied up as well, for little old Webster was no saint, and once he set out to fight, he did it, as he did everything else, with all his heart.

"I declare," Miss Stedman announced wearily one evening in the officers' dining-room, "if Charlie Webster keeps on I shall

just *have* to report him to Mr. Lincoln. He 's been fighting this whole blessed afternoon — just one boy right after another."

"Oh," cried Miss Thompson, the trained nurse, "then *that* was the reason there was so many of the little deaf boys up in the hospital this afternoon with sprained thumbs, and black eyes, and so on!"

"Exactly," Miss Stedman confirmed her, "that was Webster's doing, — the little scamp! It 's because of his shirts. Whenever his mother sends him a new shirt, and he puts it on, he has to fight almost every boy in his dormitory."

"But why? What 's the matter with his shirts?" Miss Evans, the oral teacher, demanded.

"Oh, they 're the funniest looking things! I don't see what his mother can be thinking of. They look as though they 'd been made up hind-side before, and the sleeves are never put in right, and are always too tight for him. Of course, the other children laugh at every fresh one, and that just sends him almost crazy, and he flies at one boy

after another. He knows, himself, that the shirts are n't right, but he just *will* wear them in spite of everything. I tried once to get him to put on one from the school supply, and, goodness! I thought he was going to fight me!"

It was at this time that Miss Evans asked why Webster's sign was W-on-the-eyes. Miss Stedman said she thought Chester must have given him that because he was so good to the blind children. That explanation satisfied Miss Evans, but was not, as it happened, the right one.

Little old Webster came to Lomax when he was only seven, two years before they began to teach articulation and lip reading to the children there. His education began therefore with the manual method, and by the time he was nine there was hardly a sign that he did not know, or a word that he could not spell with his flying fingers. But he was a little person who craved many forms of self-expression, and he often looked very curiously, and very wistfully, at hearing people when they talked together with

their lips. The year he was nine, which was the year of this story, they began the oral instruction at Lomax, Miss Evans being engaged for this purpose, and being given by Clarence Chester the sign of E-on-the-lips, to show that she was the person who taught the children to speak. She had to face some opposition in getting the new method established. The older children found it harder than the familiar signs, and, for the most part, shut their minds persistently against any attempt to make them speak.

Many of the teachers, also, were opposed to the oral form of instruction. There was Miss Flyn, for instance. She had taught deaf children for ten years with the sign-language, and did not see any reason for abandoning it now. And, for all her plumpness, and soft sweetness of face, Miss Eliza Flyn was a firm lady, once her mind was thoroughly made up. Her argument was that though articulation and lip-reading might be a wonderful thing for a few brilliant children, the average deaf child trained in a state school could never get

much benefit from it. "Lip-readers are born and not made," she maintained stoutly. "It 's as much a gift as an ear for music, or being able to write poetry."

"Any deaf child with the proper amount of brains, and normal sight, can be taught to articulate and read the lips," Miss Evans returned, with equal stoutness, for she was "pure oral," and could almost have found it in her heart to wish that the sign-language might be wiped off the face of the earth. There she and Miss Flyn came to a polite deadlock of opinion in the matter.

But whatever others might think, little old Webster apparently had no doubts of the advantage of the oral method. As soon as he found out what it was all about, he flung himself into the new study with even more than his usual zest and enthusiasm. Watching Miss Evans's lips with a passionate attention, his brown eyes as eager and as dumb and wistful as a little dog's, he attempted the sounds over and over, his unaccustomed lips twisting themselves into all sorts of grotesque positions, in his effort to gain con-

trol over them. He always shook his head sharply at his failures, fiercely rebuking himself, and immediately making a fresh attack upon the word or element, working persistently until Miss Evans's nod and smile at length rewarded him, upon which his whole little face would light up, and he would heave a weary but triumphant sigh. His zeal almost frightened Miss Evans, and while she constantly spurred all the other children on to using their lips instead of their eager little fingers, Webster she tried to check, fearing that his enthusiasm might even make him ill.

Early in the school term, when he had not been in Miss Evans's class much above a month, little old Webster received a post-card from his father saying that his parents expected to come to Lomax to see him in a week or so. Webster almost burst with delighted expectancy. He showed the card to every deaf child who could read, and interpreted it in signs and finger-spelling to those who could not; he permitted his blind friends to feel it all over with their delicate

inquiring fingers, and gave every teacher and officer the high privilege of reading,—

DEAR LITTLE CHARLIE: —

Your mother and I expect to come to Lomax to see you Friday of next week.

Your loving father,

CHARLES WEBSTER,

while he stood by with those dancing eyes of his, which frequently said more than speaking people's lips. He carried the card in triumph to Miss Evans, and when she had read it he made the sign for mother, and she nodded and said that was nice, taking care of course to speak rather than sign. But his little eager face clouded over, and there appeared on it that shut-in and baffled expression which it sometimes wore when he failed to make himself understood. He repeated the sign and put his hand to his lips pleadingly. Then she realized what he wanted.

"Why, bless his heart, he wants me to teach him to say mother!" she exclaimed delightedly, and sitting down on the ve-

randa steps, for it was out of school hours, she then and there set to work drilling him in the desired word, saying it repeatedly, and placing his hand against her throat that he might feel the vibrations of sound. At last, watching her lips intently, making repeated efforts doomed to failure, shaking his head angrily at himself each time, and renewing the attempt manfully, he did achieve the coveted word. To be sure it was not very distinctly said at first, and was broken into two soft little syllables, thus, "mo-ther"; but his little face shone with the triumph of it. And then in gratitude he said, "Thank you" very politely to Miss Evans, having learned those two words before in his articulation. He said them in his best voice, carefully placing one small conscientious finger on the side of his nose, which gave him a most comically serious expression, but was done to be sure that he had succeeded in putting the proper vibration into his "Thank you."

"Such foolishness!" Miss Eliza Flyn snorted, passing along the veranda at this

moment. "What 's the good of one word? And he 'll forget it anyway by to-morrow!"

But little old Webster held manfully to that hard-won word which his love had bought. Every morning when he entered the classroom he said, "Mo-ther" to Miss Evans with his enchanting smile, so that she began to be afraid that he had confused the meaning of the word, and was calling her mother. On the day, however, that she permitted him to tear the leaf from the school calendar, — a daily much-desired privilege, — she was reassured on this point, for having torn off the proper date he turned up the other leaves swiftly until he came to the day on which his parents were expected, and putting his finger on the number he said, "Mo-ther, mo-ther," and then in quaint fashion he pointed to the calendar leaf, and then to himself, and locking his forefingers together, first in one direction and then in the other, he made the little sign for friend, meaning that he was friends with that day because it would bring him his mother.

He said the word repeatedly, in school and out. He even said it in his sleep. The night before his mother was to come, when Miss Stedman paid her regular visit to the domitory where all the little deaf boys were asleep, Webster sat suddenly bolt upright in his bed, his eyes wide-open, but unseeing with sleep, and cried out, "Mother!"

"Goodness!" Miss Stedman commented to herself. "I'll be glad when his mother does come! He'll go crazy if he doesn't get that word off his tongue soon."

The next day, — the great, the miraculous day, — little old Webster was in a veritable humming-bird quiver of excitement. He jumped in his seat each time the door opened, and when, at length, Miss Flyn actually came to announce that his father and mother had really arrived, he leaped up with a face of such transcendent joy, that his departure left Miss Evans's class-room almost as dark as if the sun had passed under a cloud. So much of pure happiness went with him that, with a smile on her lips, Miss Evans let her fancy follow

him on his triumphant way, and for fully three minutes, while she pictured the surprise in store for the waiting mother, she permitted her "pure oral" class to tell each other over and over on their fingers that "E. F." (Miss Flyn's sign) had come to take W-on-the-eyes to see his father and mother, before she awoke to the fact and sternly recalled their runaway language from their fingers to their lips.

In the meantime, gripping Miss Flyn's hand tight, little old Webster went on eager tiptoe feet down the passageway leading to the reception-room. Miss Flyn could feel the vibration of excitement in his fingers as they rested in hers, and her own sympathetic heart went a beat or two faster in consequence. But almost at the reception-room door he dropped her hand suddenly and stopped dead, his face gone a despairing white, and a lost, agonized look in his eyes. For a moment, he stared about him in passionate bewilderment, then, bursting into a storm of tears, he turned to run back to Miss Evans's room. But Miss Flyn caught

him firmly and, forcing him to look at her, signed, "What is it?" He made the sign for mother, and then passed his open hand despairingly across his forehead in the sign for forgotten, and Miss Flyn realized that through over-excitement or some trick of a tired brain, his precious word had all at once slipped from him. He looked up at her, and old "signer" though she was, she could not resist the appeal of his tragic little face. Stooping down, she pronounced the lost word, placing his hand against her throat. Remembrance rushed into his eyes, and his face lit like a flame. "Mo-ther! Mo-ther!" he cried, and putting both hands tight against his mouth as if to hold the word in place, he fled down the hall and into the reception-room and flung himself upon a woman who sat very still, her waiting, listening face turned toward the door.

"Mo-ther! Mo-ther!" he cried, his arms tight about her neck.

She gave a sharp, an almost hysterical cry.

"*Charlie!*" she screamed. "Is that Charlie? Is that my deaf baby talking?"

She tore his arms from about her neck, and held him away from her, while her eager, trembling fingers went to his lips and felt them move once more, framing the wonderful word.

"It *is* Charlie! It is my little deaf and dumb baby talking!" she cried. And then she went into a wild babble of mother words, — "My baby! My lamb! My darling, precious baby!" — crying and kissing him, while the tears ran down from her eyes. And little old Webster, his word now safely delivered to the one person in all the world to whom it belonged, relapsed once more into his old soft, inarticulate grunting of "Ough, ough!" nuzzling his face close against hers, and laughing gleefully over the splendid surprise he had prepared for her.

And after one astounded, comprehending look, Miss Flyn turned, and, racing down the hallway, burst into Miss Evans's classroom and caught that teacher by the arm.

"Little old Webster's mother is *blind!*" she cried. "She's *stone blind!* She's never seen Webster in all her life. — She's never

heard him speak until this minute! They've never been able to say *one word* to each other. — She's blind, I tell you! And *that's* why Webster's sign is W-on-the-eyes, — Clarence Chester must have known, — and that's why he's always so good to the blind children, and why he fought every boy who laughed at the funny way his shirts were made — he knew his mother could n't see to make them right! And — and —" Miss Flyn choked, — "and *that's* why he's nearly killed himself trying to learn to speak. There's never been any way they could talk to each other except by feeling! She's had to wait nine years to hear him say Mother! And — and," Miss Flyn wound up unsteadily, "you need n't preach to me any more about articulation for — I'm converted!"

And with that she went out and banged the door behind her, and all the children's fingers flew up, to ask Miss Evans in excited signs what E. F. was crying about.

II

CAIN, THE KEY

A SMALL blind girl sat on the veranda steps of the Lomax School for deaf and blind children, and blew upon a tin horn. She was an appealing scrap of humanity, with her thin little body and dreamy face, and her big blank eyes which had a wistful trick of rolling up and down and from side to side, suggesting a little the restless pacing of a caged animal, as they continually quested the dark for some tiny loophole of light.

At present she was utterly happy. The spring sunshine warmed her all over, and she drank it in at every sensitive pore. She had blown at first soft little tentative notes upon her horn, just tasting, as it were, its delightful possibilities; but now she had settled to one thrilling blast emitted again and again. It is possible that in the note's apparent monotony she divined shades

of sound which the casual listener would have missed; but it was not merely sound to her, it was color, and emotion, and filled her with a passionate delight. She had not lost her sight until she was ten years old, so that now at eleven she still retained the faculty of making mental pictures, and to her mind, intoxicated by the sound, that single note appeared like a red streak of flame going up and up into the sky. It made moreover a sharp background for all the impressions which her senses gathered for her, and presently these impressions began to translate themselves into a little silent chant. She seemed to see the words like a flock of small hurrying people that ran out of her mouth, through her horn, and by that bright flame-ladder of sound went scurrying away to the warm sky. The words said: —

"I am sitting in the sunshine, I can feel it pour all over me, and my beautiful horn gathers it up and blows it back into the air. I can hear the deaf children running and laughing and playing in their yard. I can hear Janey Simons practicing on the piano

in the blind girls' sitting-room — and my beautiful horn it blows and it blows for me! The wind blows the smell of the Easter flowers in the garden to me. I think maybe the wind loves the flowers, and turns their little faces up one after another for the sun to see — and my beautiful horn it blows for me! I love Miss Cynthia. She will come presently, her footsteps as light and swift as the wind, and take us all back to school, and my beautiful horn —"

At this moment another blind girl came out of the sitting-room which opened on the porch, and, groping for the little horn-blower, caught her arm and snatched the horn violently away.

"For *mercy sakes*, Phœbe West! *Quit* blowing on that old horn like that!" she cried.

For a moment Phœbe was stunned by this sudden shattering of her entranced world; then, with a cry, she leaped to her feet and flung herself upon the other. They fought back and forth, struggling over the horn.

"Girls! Girls! Why, *Phœbe!* Janey! Why, I'm *ashamed* of you!"

Miss Cynthia, one of the younger teachers, came quickly along the porch, and separated the two.

"To think of two of my girls *fighting!*" she exclaimed.

"Well, she was enough to drive a person just *distracted!*" the assailant, a clumsy overgrown girl of fourteen, defended herself.

"She snatched my horn just when I — when I was *so* happy!" Phœbe cried passionately; and dropping down on the steps she burst into an agony of tears.

Miss Cynthia went on: —

"Why, if you girls take to behaving like this, I shall have to ask Mr. Lincoln to shut you up in that empty room at the top of the school, where he puts the boys when they've been fighting."

"But I just bet Mr. Lincoln would n't do that to the girls!" Janey protested, the rudeness of her tone hardly masking its panic; and Phœbe stopped crying, and raised her head to listen.

"Why, certainly he would if the girls behave like bad boys," Miss Cynthia returned. "And now," she added as, recess being over, the bell rang, "come along to school and I 'll tell you something interesting. Come along, little girl." Reaching down she took Phœbe's small hand which always clung so affectionately to hers, and jumped her to her feet.

Over in the classroom, Miss Cynthia's "something interesting" proved to be that Mr. Lincoln, the Superintendent, to stimulate the imagination of the younger children, had offered the prize of a book for the best set of verses written within the next week by any blind child under fifteen. The whole Blind Department was to celebrate the occasion with ice-cream and cake; the cake to be a large fancy one decorated with white icing, and to have the winner's name done in pink across the top, — a tribute from Mr. Hartwell, the baker, who, though himself a deaf mute, could always be counted upon to further any good cause in the school.

"I should feel very proud if one of my

scholars were to win such a prize," Miss Cynthia concluded impressively, "and I have a feeling that there is a child here who might win it, if he or she — I won't say whether I am thinking of a boy or a girl — chose to try hard enough."

"I just know Miss Cynthia means me," Janey Simons whispered to her next neighbor with a satisfied little toss of her head, "'cause of that poem I wrote on Easter."

But Miss Cynthia did not mean Janey. All her hopes were secretly centered upon Phœbe West, whose poetic fancy flashed out now and again like a sudden bright flame set vividly off against the unimaginative background of the other children's good average little brains.

Phœbe had lost her sight only a year and a half ago, and had therefore not been playing the difficult game of how-to-be-blind for very long; and with all the bright pictures of what the world held for seeing people still stored in her eager mind, which had always taken such passionate delight in lovely things, she found the game harder

to play than did the children who had been at it longer. Despairingly hard it was at times, and at these times after she came to Lomax, her adored Miss Cynthia had understood, and had helped and comforted, and in consequence there had grown up between the two a very close tie of affection.

Whatever Phœbe may have been before the loss of her sight, the school only knew her as a docile and timid little creature who through her parents' misplaced solicitude had been so waited upon and led about by a large family of brothers and sisters that she was as yet very dependent upon some friendly hand to guide her in the dark of her little world. So usually fearful of finding her way alone was she, that Miss Cynthia was astounded, when returning that afternoon from a walk with one of the teachers, to catch sight some distance from the school grounds of a small blue-and-white gingham-clad figure huddled close in a corner of the rail-fence bordering the roadside.

"Why, Phœbe! Why, little girl, what are you doing out here all alone!" she exclaimed.

At the sound of her voice the child leaped up with a glad little tremulous cry.

"O Miss Cynthia!" she quavered, acute relief in her voice. "Oh! I *hoped* maybe those would be your darling footsteps coming down the road." She clung to the teacher's hand trembling a little, "I — I was *scared*," she whispered.

Here Miss Julia, Cynthia's companion, a much older teacher, saw fit to make a protest in behalf of discipline.

"Don't you know it's against the rules to go out of the grounds like this?" she demanded.

Miss Julia was an estimable person, but one whose voice fell with no softness upon the sensitive ears of small blind people detected in disobedience. Miss Cynthia was conscious that Phœbe trembled faintly as she leaned against her.

"I do believe you were running away!" Miss Julia pursued severely.

"Yes — yes'm," Phœbe faltered and hung her head.

"You *were!* Why, I'm perfectly astonished! What were you doing it for?"

Looking down at the curve of the child's painfully crimsoning cheek, it seemed to Cynthia that an intangible veil of reserve and almost defiance was drawn suddenly across the sensitive little face.

"I don't know," the child answered, her voice almost lost in fear.

"Don't know! Of *course* you know! Don't tell *me* stories, and don't let me catch you out of bounds again, or I'll report you to Mr. Lincoln and he'll very likely lock you up all alone in that room where he puts the bad boys."

At this second mention of that prison room Phœbe's nervous fingers twitched in Miss Cynthia's grasp, and the latter felt an acute indignation over the other teacher's severity; but Miss Julia was the senior in command and she dared not interfere.

If Miss Cynthia had been astounded to find Phœbe out on the high road all alone,

events followed swiftly which were more than astounding; in the light of the small girl's heretofore affectionate and shrinking character, they were no less than appalling. At half-past ten the next morning, in Miss Cynthia's classroom, Phœbe West put out a small feeling foot, and deliberately tripped up Janey Simons as she was innocently passing the former's desk. Janey came sprawling to the floor, bumping her head and immediately bursting into wild tears.

Miss Cynthia rushed forward and picked her up. "Why, *Phœbe!*" she cried in consternation.

Phœbe had started to her feet and stood trembling slightly, her whole little person keyed to an intensity of listening. Her face was white and horrified, and in a moment she too dissolved in tears.

Miss Cynthia soothed the frightened Janey, and put some hamamelis on the bumped head.

"For such outrageous conduct I shall report Phœbe West to Mr. Lincoln," she announced, her usually sweet voice so alarm-

ingly stern, that every small pupil applied frightened fingers diligently to the raised print of the lesson books, afraid to do more than wrinkle an inquisitive nose, and sniff very faintly at the smell of hamamelis, though at ordinary times it would have occasioned much pleasant conversation.

"Mr. Lincoln he — he won't put me up in that big room all — all alone, will he?" Phœbe's shaky little voice inquired, feeling its way unsteadily, as it were, through the dark.

"I don't know what he will think necessary to do to a little girl who for no reason *whatever* deliberately trips another one up," Miss Cynthia returned coldly.

At this statement of the outrage committed upon her, Janey shed a few more tears.

Phœbe escaped the locking up, however, Mr. Lincoln ordering her to bed straight after supper, hours before the other children; a form of punishment over which Miss Cynthia drew a secret breath of relief. As a child she had suffered an acute

fear of being locked into places, and she could not bear the thought of her timid little Phœbe having to pass through such an ordeal.

The next day, however, she underwent a change of heart in the matter. When she entered her schoolroom with her bright "morning face," she found the children awaiting her, but not seated as usual at their desks. Instead they were in an agitated group surrounding her treasured rose-geranium, a plant which usually graced the window-sill, — lending a refreshing fragrance to the room, most grateful to small inquiring noses, — but which now lay shattered upon the floor. It had been dear to the whole room, for the gift of one of its spicy leaves pinned on the front of an apron, or stuck in the buttonhole of a coat, had been Miss Cynthia's highest mark of approbation; and the children bent over it in deep solicitude, feeling with delicate, excited fingers the bruised leaves, and all the wreckage of earth and broken pottery.

"Oh my poor geranium! How *did* it happen?" Miss Cynthia cried.

Instantly all the little listening faces turned in her direction and a very babel of accusation broke forth.

"Phœbe —"

"Phœbe West she did it —"

"She pulled it right over on purpose —"

"She said, 'I'm going to smash that old geranium,' an' she did!"

"Yes, sir! Miss Cynthia, that's just what she did do!"

Miss Cynthia looked at Phœbe in consternation.

"Did you break my pretty plant on purpose?" she demanded incredulously.

Phœbe, conscious with her whole strained little body of her teacher's eyes upon her, showed a small tragic face; nevertheless she affirmed the accusation.

"Yes'm," she whispered with an effort.

"But why? what do you mean by such behavior?"

Phœbe hung her head, but gave no answer.

Miss Cynthia regarded her a moment in a hurt and perplexed silence; then, "Take your reader, and come with me," she said. "As you cannot behave properly with other children, and with pretty things, I shall put you upstairs in that empty room, where you will have to study all alone."

In the oppressive silence and loneliness of the top story, Miss Cynthia, after trying in vain to win some explanation of her extraordinary conduct from Phœbe, left the child, a small desolate figure seated on the floor in the very middle of the wide bare room. The teacher's heart smote her as she turned the key in the lock, and she lingered a moment outside, dreading an outburst of panic-stricken tears. But all was silent. When she returned later to release her, however, there were signs that Phœbe had wept copiously.

The situation developed rapidly and appallingly. The next day Miss Cynthia's usually well-ordered classroom was reduced to pandemonium. Immediately after school was assembled, Phœbe West, with a set fa-

talistic little face, went on what might be termed a whirlwind campaign. Within the space of three short, stormy minutes she slapped Johnny Coleman's plump, surprised little face, snatched away Janey Simons's book, and gave Maggie Ridgeway's flaxen curls an agonizing jerk. After which opening she became a veritable little fury, attacking any and everybody with whom her fingers came in contact, until with a swift and terrible hand Miss Cynthia dragged her from a crowd of outraged children and marched her off upstairs. There, failing again to make the child explain herself, she locked her up once more, but this time she did not linger soft-heartedly outside. Closing the door firmly, she turned the key with a grating shriek, which she hoped might send a shiver of terror into the heart of the incomprehensible little culprit within.

That evening after supper the extraordinary behavior of Phœbe West was the subject of acute discussion in the teachers' hall.

"I *can't* make her out!" Miss Cynthia confessed in despair. "In the last few days

she has changed absolutely from the gentlest, dearest little child into a perfect demon, and I *never* know what she may do next. She acts as though she were possessed, as though something were driving her to do these things against her will."

"I would n't be a bit surprised if she was losing her mind," Miss Julia prophesied gloomily. "I thought there was something funny about her that day we found her out in the road all alone. That girl I had in my class from the Fells County Poorhouse went exactly that way, At first she was as sweet a child as you ever saw, and then she took to acting in a peculiar manner, and the next thing I knew she went right *off* her head and —" Here Miss Julia unfolded a terrible story of child suffering. "And it would n't surprise me *one bit* if Phœbe West was going just that same way," she wound up.

"Oh, no! Oh, *no*, she won't!" Miss Cynthia protested in horror.

"Perhaps she has adenoids, or her teeth need looking after," suggested another

teacher, one who had a firm belief that the only thing necessary to make the world a sweet and beautiful place, was the elimination of all adenoids and the straightening of all teeth.

"No, I don't think that 's the trouble," Miss Cynthia said. "I have a feeling you know that there 's a perfectly simple and natural explanation of the whole business if I could only find the key to it — if I could *only* find the key," she repeated distractedly. "And I *did* so hope she was going to win Mr. Lincoln's prize for the best verses!" she burst out presently. "But of course, she won't now, she has n't written a thing, and that conceited little Janey Simons has hers all finished. They begin,

'I love my teacher dear,
Her voice it is so clear.'

She asked me this morning if I thought Mr. Hartwell would know how to spell Simons, and of *course* she 's perfectly sure her name is going to be on that cake."

Miss Cynthia tossed on a restless pillow that night. Miss Julia's terrible story re-

turned to stare at her through the dark hours ; and suppose, *suppose* Phœbe West were on the point of going off her poor little head ! She entered her classroom the next morning in a high state of nervous apprehension. The day's lessons always opened with a selection from the Bible, and it was Phœbe's turn to read. Miss Cynthia would have given much if it had not been, though in times past she had liked to listen to the child's soft, slightly hesitating voice which had such pretty inflections, and always thrilled so to the sonorous Bible words. But now ? To what outrageous act might not the command to read provoke her perhaps unbalanced mind ? With a beating heart she spread open the huge volume of Genesis upon Phœbe's desk, and finding the day's lesson, placed the child's fingers on the raised dots of the opening verse. To her unbounded relief Phœbe began obediently to read, her slender forefinger moving patiently across the page, as her butterfly touch translated the dots into words for her eager little mind.

"And the Lord said unto Cain, Where is Abel thy brother? And he said I know not. Am I my brother's keeper?"

She read steadily on until her fingers came to the sentence, "A fugitive and a vagabond shalt thou be in the earth." Here she paused, spelling out the two long words for Miss Cynthia to pronounce.

"What does that mean?" she demanded abruptly.

With a start the teacher brought her mind back from a relieved contemplation of the soft spring sky seen through the windows, to the anxiety of the present.

"Why, it means that he was driven away from his own people because he was a murderer, and had to go out into the world all alone," she explained.

"Into the world all alone — did it mean that he would be all alone?" Phœbe persisted.

"Yes, that's what it means."

"In the wide world all alone," the child repeated dreamily. Suddenly she brought her hands up tight against her breast.

"Oh!" she cried poignantly, "Oh, I *wish I* was Cain!"

And pushing the book from her, she buried her head in her arm and burst into passionate tears. A wave of startled emotion swept over the other children, and every little blind face swayed in the direction of those heartbroken sobs. They seemed to appreciate the teacher's anxiety, and to surmise that these were no ordinary tears.

Cynthia was appalled. Nevertheless, she forced herself to rise. If Phœbe were on the point of insanity, she must at least be taken away from the other children. Going over, she laid a quiet hand on the small grief-shaken figure.

"Come outside with me, dear," she said.

Out in the big deserted hall, away from the strained curiosity of the other children, Phœbe continued to sob, but she clung with all her old trusting affection to Miss Cynthia, and the latter's heart melted within her.

"Poor little thing! Poor little honey!" she whispered tenderly, "Tell me what the trouble is."

Seating herself upon the lowest step of the stairs leading to the classrooms above, where the deaf children could be heard drilling over their vowel sounds monotonously in unison, — "a-a-a-a, e-e-e-e-e-e-e," — she gathered the child close in her arms, stroking the bowed head softly, and waiting for the tears to subside a little.

"Oh, I *wish* I was Cain!" Phœbe cried passionately again.

"But, darling, Cain was a dreadful man!" Miss Cynthia protested, distressed. "Why he killed his very own brother."

"But God let him be alone, and — and *that's* what I want to be!" the child cried; and catching her breath sharply she broke into a torrent of hurrying, sob-choked words. "I'm never — *never* alone! I — I have to eat with other children, and play with them, and sleep with them, and study with them, and — and go to church and to walk with them! And I can never, *never* be by myself one minute out of the whole day! They 're *always* other children just swarming *everywhere!* And at home it's the same

way; my mother 's got lots of us, and they *never* let me be one minute! The only time I 'm ever really alone is — is when I wake up in the night when all the other children are asleep. But" — she sobbed, "but I don't wake up very often! When I could — could see, I used to run away into the woods all by myself, and oh, I just loved it! And — and I tried to run away here, that day you and Miss Julia found me out on the road, but — but after I got out all by myself, it was — was all so sort of big and dark, that I — I was scared — it was n't like when I could see!"

"Phœbe!" cried Miss Cynthia, a great light dawning upon her, "have you been behaving so badly for the sake of being put up in that big room all alone?"

The child hid her face close against the other's shoulder, but she nodded with a muffled sob. "Yes, that was why," she confessed. "But I — I could n't tell you, 'cause of course you would n't have put me there then. But — but it did n't do any good," she added forlornly, "'cause I could n't

think of anything after I got there but just how bad I 'd been — it — it was *awful* to be so bad!"

"But why do you want to be alone, darling?" Miss Cynthia questioned.

"So I can think. There 're all sorts of lovely things that I think about when I 'm alone. And I wanted specially now to make up a poem for the prize 'cause — 'cause you said you 'd be so pleased if one of your children got it. But now I won't be able to," she went on with a little wail, "'cause the children are just swarming and swarming, all the time, and they *never* let me be! I don't want to be alone much, only just sometimes, when my — my — I guess it 's my soul — wants to sort of breathe. Oh, you don't know what it is to have people around all day long — every minute — and at night, too! Folks that can see can get off to themselves whenever they want to — — and I used to be able to — but — but now! I just *never* can!"

After a moment's silence Miss Cynthia spoke: —

"If you will stop crying now, and be very good all the rest of the morning, I will let you come this afternoon and sit a little while in my room."

"All alone?" the child raised a tear-wet, tremulously eager little face.

"Yes, all alone."

"With my horn?"

Miss Cynthia hesitated; the remembrance of that one plaintive nerve-wracking note in her mind.

"Why do you want your horn?" she evaded.

"'Cause when I blow it, it says lovely things to me — it was just beginning to say beautiful things that time Janey Simons came in and snatched it away."

"Very well, then," Miss Cynthia capitulated.

The child's face kindled with a transcendent happiness.

"Oh, I will be *so* good!" she cried. "It'll be nice to be good again," she added with a little weary sigh, as of a soul that has been lost and is found again.

That afternoon the thrilling note of a horn, blown over and over again, might have been heard coming from Miss Cynthia's room; and when that teacher returned from her afternoon walk, she found a happy child curled up in an easy chair by the open window, the air with its whiffs of spring perfume stirring her hair faintly; all the baffled strange expression smoothed from her face, and in its stead the tranquil, shining look of one whose spirit has been in sunny places.

"Oh, I have been *so* happy!" she cried breathlessly, jumping up and stretching out eager arms along which all the warmth of her heart seemed running to meet her teacher. "And my horn made some poetry for me," she added. "It told me about spring at home."

Dropping the other's hands, she stood a little away from her, and raising her entranced face turned it slightly from side to side, feeling unconsciously the soft air, first with one cheek then with the other, as she recited in a voice shaky from excitement:—

"My trumpet it blows and it blows for me,
And it makes bright pictures that I can see.
It tells me of spring and the jonquils gay
That bloom in the yard where I used to play;
That the children are running along to school,
But they 'll stop awhile to play in the pool,
To splash the water and laugh and sing,
'Cause children go mad when they know it 's spring.
And father is burning brush to-day,
I can see the blue smoke go blowing away,
And the mousey turkey has gone to lay;
She 'll leave her nest on tip-toe feet
So no one will guess where she took her seat.
And mother is scrubbing and cleaning, I know,
And making the house just as white as snow.
And the world it is all so full of spring,
That children and grown-ups just *have* to sing!
And my trumpet it blows and it blows for me,
And it makes bright pictures that I can see!"

"Oh!" she finished, "*that's* why I love my trumpet 'cause it makes my mind see what my eyes can't see any more."

Miss Cynthia felt a sharp ache in her throat.

"But any way," she told herself, "her verses are better than any of the other children's."

Phœbe slipped her hand back into hers.

"I 'd be glad if my poem took the prize," she said, "but I did n't really make it for that. I wanted to make it for you, 'cause, —'cause I love you," she whispered shyly.

III

RED BIRD, HE CAN SEE

"JIMMIE," said George Washington Morris, better known among the blind boys at the Lomax School for deaf and blind children as "Red Bird," because he hailed from a little post-office place of that name. "Jimmie, what would you do if you was to fall into a gre-at *big* ditch?"

Red Bird was given to facing Jimmy Little, his small running mate, with terrifying problems of the foregoing nature.

"Just Jimmie," the teachers called the latter among themselves, from his habit of repudiating his last name.

"No, sir," he would say, wrinkling up his thin gray-mouse little face with its shrunken, scared eyes. "No, sir, I don't know nothin' about no Little name. Mr. Todd at the poorhouse he tagged that on to me, when he sent me here to school. I reckon he thought it sort of finished a fella

out like, to have a second name. But I never had no folks, they found me when I was a baby just throwed away 'long side of the Mill Creek highroad — that 's one of the roads down in Lupin County — and I never was called nothin' but just Jimmie. But," he was apt to add as a triumphant afterthought, "Red Bird *he 's* got folks, an' he kin see too!"

At Red Bird's question in regard to the big ditch, Just Jimmie's upraised listening face twitched all over with excitement as it always did whenever his hero spoke. It was as though the words actually fell upon his waiting little visage.

"Why — why, Red Bird, I think I 'd pray," he offered eagerly, after due consideration.

"Humph," the other retorted scornfully. "Bet yer *I* could git out a heap quicker 'n that!"

"Well, maybe *you* could, Red Bird — maybe you could, 'cause you kin see, you kin see real good." (Red Bird's face screwed itself into a curious little frown at this

tribute.) "An' 'course," Jimmie went on, elaborating his philosophy, "if a fella kin see he don't have to pray so much."

"A fella *has* to pray, anyhow, whether he kin see or not," Red Bird declared severely. "You don't reckon seein' makes any difference to the Lord, do you?"

Though this last was put in the shape of a reproof, there was, nevertheless, the hint of a wistful question in Red Bird's tone.

"Er course it don't make no difference to the *Lord* whether you kin see er not," Jimmie returned, waving about excitedly, "but — but it makes a heap of difference to yourself."

It was George Washington's Birthday, not Red Bird's, but that of the father of his country. The school in consequence was indulging in a half holiday, for which reason Red Bird and Jimmie were free to perch at leisure on the steps of the blind boys' sitting-room, and speculate over such high problems as prayer and big ditches.

When Jimmie Little had arrived the previous autumn at Lomax, Mr. Lincoln,

the Superintendent, thought he had never before seen such a forlorn, gray-mouse bit of a blind boy of eight. Just a little human derelict tossed over to Lomax from the Lupin County Poorhouse. Blind he was, of course; thin as a little skeleton; bewildered by his new surroundings; dazed by all the babble and confusion of the sixty or so other blind children; and more than usually handicapped in finding his way about by having slipped down a flight of stairs and broken one arm. He was forever missing his bearings and getting lost. This, however, he appeared to be used to, and if no friendly hand arrived to guide him into port, he curled himself up wherever he happened to be and dropped off to sleep. And being stumbled over and furiously berated by the other blind boys, "for *allus* layin' 'round in the way!" was apparently just one more drop in his bitter bewildered cup of existence, and wrung from him no retort or defense.

On the fourth day of school, however, George Washington Morris, Red Bird the

masterful, the braggart, the triumphantly self-confident, blundered over Just Jimmie's little curled-up person, lost in the wide courtyard between two of the school buildings, and at once took him in tow.

"You just hitch on to *me*, kid," he had commanded; "I 'm pretty nigh nine years old, an' I been at Lomax for more 'n a year, an' I kin tell you there ain't much erbout this ole school *I* don't know. An' anyhow I kin see real good."

Jimmie closed joyfully with the friendly offer, and from that time Red Bird became his hero — nay, he was more than a mere hero, he made up the romance, the poetry, the zest, of Just Jimmie's existence. To him the other boy was as exciting as a pitched battle, as intoxicating as wine. The contagion of this new buoyant personality wrought an extraordinary change in him. He began to hold up his head, to walk with more confidence, even to develop a comical little swagger of his own. And all day long his thin little voice was forever proclaiming the wonders of Red Bird. How

strong Red Bird was, how he could fight —"Yes, sir! Lick any boy at Lomax!" How he had folks — folks who sent him postcards — "Why — why Red Bird, he — he gits a postcard from *his* folks most — most every day — leastways he gits one onct a week *anyhow*." But most of all Just Jimmie's pæan was, "Red Bird, *he* kin see!"

When Red Bird's parents had brought him to Lomax the year before, his mother had seized an opportunity to say privately to Mr. Lincoln, "Georgie can see a little with one eye — just the least little bit. It ain't anything really, not much more than telling light from dark, but," she went on with wistful shamefacedness, "maybe we 've kind of humored him into thinkin' he can see more than he really can. He 's so terrible proud of it that — some way" — she swallowed — "we just *could n't* tell him the truth. But he ain't really lyin' when he says all that about how well he can see," she added in quick defense, "'cause he thinks he can see real good."

And later on when Mr. Lincoln saw Red

Bird staring at an intensely bright electric flashlight held within a few inches of his eye, and heard him announce triumphantly, "There now I kin see that light just fine, an' yet some folks says I 'm nearsighted," he had understood.

Through the open door of the sitting-room there came all at once a burst of shouts for Red Bird.

"Here, Red Bird, where you —"

"Read my postcard for me —"

"No, sir! He 's not, he 's goin' to read mine for me —"

Red Bird and Jimmie scrambled up from the steps and groped their way to the shouting group of boys within, Jimmie's quavering little voice keeping up a devoted refrain of "Red Bird he kin see, he kin see to read postcards 'most as good as sighted folks," though nobody was paying the least attention to him.

"Well boys, how are you?" an unexpected grown-up voice inquired pleasantly.

For an instant the animation of the little company fell to a dead listening silence.

Then realizing that the voice belonged to Miss Lyman, their matron, they burst into a chorus of friendly greeting, Jimmie coming in behind all the rest with — "I 'm-very-well-I-thank-you'm-How-are-you ? " said all in one breath, and very much as if her query had pulled a string, or touched a button somewhere or other in his small anatomy.

"Is n't this a beautiful holiday ? " she went on. "It 's real spring weather, and don't the mountains look beautiful — " She caught herself up sharply, biting her lips.

"I heard Mrs. Lincoln say they was looking lovely this morning," one of the older boys answered politely, possibly divining the reason for her sudden pause.

"Gee ! I don't have to have nobody *tell* me mountains is pretty, I kin see 'em for myself," Red Bird boasted.

"Well, I can't *see* er mountain, but — but I kin smell 'em," Jimmie announced, crinkling up his nose, and sniffing excitedly from side to side.

One of the other boys gave a great shout

of laughter. "Well, just listen to *that* kid, will you! He says he can *smell* a mountain!" he cried. "Say, what does it smell like anyhow, Jimmie?"

Jimmie's sensitive little face went crimson. "It — it smells like woods, an' — an' like things growin', an' wet leaves, an' that's a all-right way to tell about a mountain, ain't it, Red Bird? You — you can't *hear* a mountain, an' — an' — an'" (Just Jimmie always fell to wild stuttering when put on the defensive) "an' it's too big to *feel*, so if you c-can't *see*, why *smellin's* a all-right way to tell about it. Ain't it, Red Bird? Ain't smellin' a all-right way to tell about a mountain?" he appealed shrilly.

"'Course it is," Red Bird returned, "an' —" he whirled suddenly and, with swift fingers ascertaining the direction of the boy who had laughed, implanted on his face a sudden and stinging blow — "an maybe *that 'll* learn *you* to know it is," he wound up.

"Why, *George!*" Miss Lyman cried, flinging herself between him and his out-

raged victim. "Why, what on earth makes you act like that!"

Red Bird thrust his hands into his pockets, and executed an awkward and wholly unrepentant double shuffle.

"I dunno," he returned engagingly, "but sometimes seems like I feel so good, I just naturally *have* to smack somebody."

"You could have told Edward Jimmie's way of telling about a mountain was all right, without hitting him —"

"Maybe so, Miss Lyman," Red Bird interrupted (instructing her airily) "but if you 'll notice you 'll see er fella is mighty apt to know a thing a heap better if you tell it to him with your fist."

Catching his hero's spirit, Jimmie thrust his thumb and forefinger gruesomely into his eye-sockets, and spun round and round in a grotesque little war-dance of his own.

"Yes, sir! That 's the way to tell 'em, Red Bird! That 's the way!" he cried, the shrill anxiety of his voice changed to triumph, "I just knowed that was a all-

right way to tell a mountain, an' Red Bird, he knows, 'cause *he* kin see!"

"Yes, Red Bird can see," another boy chimed in. "Gee! If I could see good as him, bet I would n't be at no blind school."

Red Bird let this pass.

"Here, boys," he cried briskly, "gimme yer cards so 's I kin read 'em for you; I ain't got all day to fool with you all."

Putting out a groping hand, he took a card from the nearest boy, and holding it up before his face he began, "Dear Son, this is to let you know I am well, an' hopes you are the same. You must be a good boy, an' learn your lessons good. From your respectful father."

"Why, George! how well you read!" Miss Lyman exclaimed in astonishment. Involuntarily she took the card from him, but the words which stared up at her were, —

"Dear little Robert, — How are you getting along? Sadie was sick a spell but is now better. Don't forget your father and mother."

"Why, the little *liar!*" she cried sharply to herself, and turned upon Red Bird.

He had shrunk slightly away, every line of his body speaking of a strained consciousness of her reproachful eyes upon him, and his averted face was half-pleading, half-defiant.

"George," she began gravely.

But suddenly Jimmie's quavering pipe cut in with, "Yes, sir! Red Bird kin see to read writin' good as anybody."

Miss Lyman shut her lips tight. Jimmie had choked her intended reproof to silence. It did not seem to her that she could shatter his idol in his very presence, but she registered a vow to have a serious talk with George in private.

At this moment word came that Miss Cynthia — the teacher who was managing the entertainment to be held that evening by the blind department of the school, in celebration of the day — wanted all the boys who were to take part in it to come and rehearse.

"Come on, kid," Red Bird cried, reach-

ing out an arm for Jimmie in the general scramble. "Mind out now for that bench —"

But alas! in thus masterfully guiding Jimmie, Red Bird struck his own head against the sharp edge of a half-open door.

"*Oh!*" cried Miss Lyman, starting forward.

"What 's the matter, Red Bird? What 's the matter — what 'd you run into?" Jimmie cried distractedly.

For a moment the blow had staggered Red Bird, and he leaned dizzily against the door, panting and struggling against the surge of tears; but at Jimmie's words he flashed up straight and flung his shoulders back.

"I did n't run into *nothin'!* 'Course I did n't! What 's the matter with you? Don't you know I kin see?" he cried passionately, proudly, while the blow on his forehead swelled to a hot finger of red.

The entertainment in celebration of Washington's Birthday that evening was

drawing to its close. It had been a great success. There had been patriotic songs, recitations, and dialogues. There had even been a one-act play, in which Red Bird's engaging self-confidence, unblemished by any hint of stage fright, had brought down the house, and had so inspired Jimmie that he had even achieved a small success of his own.

An address by Mr. Lincoln had followed the play. He made no attempt at impassioned oratory, but he had a clear-voiced, earnest, direct manner of appeal which aroused every child, boy or girl, from fiddling with fingers or buttons, to listen with all his or her attention. And as with swift, vivid word-strokes he presented the glories of patriotism and of truth, there was not a small heart there which did not go a beat or two faster, or a little soul which did not dedicate itself to a stricter truth, and a higher devotion to its country.

There remained just one more number on the programme, then the general singing of "My Country, 't is of Thee," and

then, ice-cream and cake and bed, with Washington's Birthday of nineteen hundred and fourteen swinging into its place among the years crowned with all the honor and glory of which the Lomax School was capable.

"I 'm glad you said what you did about truth," Miss Lyman commented warmly, as Mr. Lincoln dropped to a seat beside her and Mrs. Lincoln. "I trust our small George Washington may take it to heart. You know what stories he tells about how much he can see."

"Yes," said Mr. Lincoln thoughtfully, "I had Red Bird very much in mind. He always exaggerated about that, but it seems to me his imagination has grown perfectly unbridled ever since I let him go home for the Christmas holidays. His parents are extremely foolish, but of course he can see a very little, and it must be hard for them to check him. But why don't the festivities proceed?" he broke off, realizing that for some reason there was an unusually long wait.

"What do we finish with?" He glanced at his programme. "Oh, 'My Name it is George Washington,' sung by George Washington Morris. Red Bird seems slow in testifying to the fact."

"I don't wonder," Miss Lyman laughed. "Ah, here he is," she added in relief, as the curtains, manipulated by two of the big deaf boys, swung apart to reveal the small performer holding a large American flag over his head.

Suddenly, unexpectedly, a sharp ache clutched Miss Lyman's throat. Red Bird was all alone upon the stage, and somehow she had never before realized what a little boy he was. Moreover, there was something about his face that seemed to blur and soften away its usual swaggering conceit.

"Why — why he 's been *crying!*" she whispered sharply.

Nevertheless, flinging his head back with his usual swagger, Red Bird struck bravely into his song. It was one of exalted sentiment in which a small boy enumerated the

different things he could not do, because (the refrain)

"My name it is George Washington, I cannot tell a lie,
Beneath this flag he gave to us, So let me live and die."

Red Bird's clear voice managed the opening lines well enough until he came to the refrain. There he faltered, almost stopped, recovered himself desperately, struggled on somehow to the end, waved his flag, and rushed on to the next verse.

"Think of Red Bird having stage fright," Miss Lyman commented uncomfortably.

"That 's not stage fright," Mr. Lincoln whispered. "Look at Jimmie," he added sharply.

Across the isle from them, in his place among the smaller blind boys, Jimmie sat — a keyed-up, tense little figure, all the usual eager waving of his body fallen now to a frightened stillness. His elbow on his knee, thumb and forefinger thrust into his eye-sockets, he sat, bowed over, listening — listening with his whole body. He was per-

fectly motionless save for a faint agonized quiver, responding like some tuned instrument to that throb of emotion in Red Bird's voice, and there was nothing that he could do. Nothing save sit there in the dark and wait and listen, while there, almost in touch of him, the being who made up the romance and delight of his existence met his tragedy all alone.

Red Bird was nearing the end of the second verse, and with every word the refrain was looming nearer. He stumbled on somehow to the last line, then —

"My name it is George Washington, I — I —"

He could get no further. He stopped dead, panting, struggling, breathless, fighting with all his proud little boy soul to choke the tears back. But it was no use. The flag dropped from his hands, he flung his arm across his face, gave one little sharp gulp, and broke down before them all.

Some one with presence of mind hurried the curtains together, while Miss Cynthia at the piano dashed into "My Country, 't is of Thee," and after a dazed moment

the audience rose and sang, and the entertainment came to an end.

"Well, sirs! What do you know about that! Red Bird *he 's* a great singer, now ain't he!" one of the blind boys jeered.

A little wild ball of fury launched itself upon him.

"I 'll learn you to laugh at Red Bird!" Jimmie screamed.

"Doggone you, Little! Get out er here!" bellowed the outraged boy.

"An' I 'll learn you my name ain't Little! It 's Jimmie! Jimmie! nothin' but just Jimmie!" Beside himself with passion Jimmie hammered the information home, until Miss Lyman and Mr. Lincoln rushing up shook the two apart.

"Where 's Red Bird?" Jimmie demanded, stemming all rebuke.

"He has gone to bed," Miss Lyman answered. "I promised to save his candy and cake for him. No," she added, seeing Mr. Lincoln's questioning eyes upon her, "I could n't get him to tell me what the trouble was."

"I 'm goin' to bed, too, I don't want no ice-cream," Jimmie announced.

"No, you are not," Miss Lyman returned firmly. "I want George to go to sleep, and if you 're there you 'll just wake him up."

Later that evening, when the small blind boys trooped into their dormitory, Red Bird lay very straight and still in his cot, his head buried deep among the pillows.

Later still when all the scuffle of going to bed was quiet, and every one supposedly asleep, Jimmie, after a long, long time of lying on his back and waiting with the dark stillness pressing down on his face, heard — what he had known he would hear — the creaking sound of Red Bird's cot, as the figure in it relaxed, a sobbing breath, and then stifled crying.

Jimmie slipped out of his own cot which was next, and stumbled across the way.

"Red Bird, it 's me, it 's just Jimmie," he whispered wistfully. His groping arm crept timidly about the other's neck.

"Don't cry, Red Bird," he implored.

But Red Bird shrugged him angrily away.

"Git out!" he gasped.

Jimmie hesitated a moment, then crept away through the dormitory between the long rows of sleeping boys.

There came presently at Miss Lyman's door the soft faint sound of groping fingers, and then a timid knock. In the dim light of the hall she found Jimmie's shivering little figure.

"It 's — it 's Red Bird," he whispered, touching her dress lightly to assure himself that she was really there. "He 's cryin' just awful."

Miss Lyman went down the dormitory to investigate, stopping on the way to jump Jimmie back into his bed.

Red Bird was indeed crying just "awful," the difficult strangled tears of a proud child.

He quivered away from her touch, seeming to desire to burrow into the very mattress.

"Come into my room, honey, where

there 's a nice fire, and tell me what the trouble is," she whispered, urging his reluctant little figure out of bed.

In her room he crumpled up in a big chair before the fire, his head buried deep in his arms, and all his gay conceit utterly routed.

"I 'm — I 'm a liar, Miss Lyman!" he broke out at length with a gasp.

Miss Lyman was conscious of the sudden twinkle of tears in her eyes. It was one thing to call him a "dreadful little liar" in her own heart, faced by his lordly boasting, but quite another to have him admit it in that small heart-broken voice.

"Why, dear?" She compromised softly.

"I can't see one thing."

The five short words came in a gust desperately.

"Oh, but you can see a little," she cried in quick extenuation. "Of course I know you can't see as much as you pretend to, but —"

"I *can't!* I can't — I tell you!" he interrupted her passionately. "I can't see *one*

thing any more! An' I 've lied, an' lied, an' *lied* — "

His voice went out in a little sharp sob, but presently he stumbled on again.

"I uster could see real good, most — most as good as sighted folks, but — but when I was home Christmas there was a kind of a quack doctor fella come 'round an' told my mother for — for ten dollars he 'd fixed my eyes so 's I could see sure 'nough. An' she gave him the money — it was some she was saving to buy a tombstone for our baby that died — an' the doctor he made a kind of a cut in my eye — an' — I ain't never seen a thing since, not — not *one thing*."

"O my little boy!" Miss Lyman cried pitifully.

And now he let her warm sorry arms creep about him, and turning, pressed his face against her shoulder.

"I uster could see. I was n't tellin' no lies then," he sobbed. "I uster could see sure 'nough. I could see 'lectric lights if they was close. An' onct in er thunder-

storm, I seen er lightnin' flash, an' most always on clear days, I could see the sun — honest I could, Miss Lyman, I could see it real good. But now I can't see *nothin'*," he whispered. "An' I've just lied an' lied er-bout it." His broken little story came with long pauses between. "Some way I just *could n't* tell the fellas the truth, an' so — so I just went on an' lied, an' acted like I could see better 'n ever — An' I never thought 'bout havin' to tell the truth 'cause of my name till — till after what Mr. Lincoln said — but now I reckon I'll just have to tell. I — I sort of hate to tell Jimmie worst of all," he dragged out at last.

And Miss Lyman knew that the telling Jimmie was the bitterest drop in all the bitter cup.

"Some way he — he thinks I can see so awful good," Red Bird explained brokenly.

She caressed him softly for a moment in silence, her heart full of rage at the "quack doctor fella." At length she said, —

"How would it do to tell Jimmie now and get it over with?"

"Well — " he said after a long moment, a reluctant crushed consent.

Miss Lyman brought Jimmie in, a very small white-clad father confessor. His little face, sharp with anxiety, turned from side to side, as he seemed to feel the aura of his friend's misery.

"Red Bird has something to tell you, Jimmie," Miss Lyman said.

He put out his eager hands — which for all their thinness and smallness were so alive with character — and found his hero's bowed shoulders.

"Such *little* boys!" Miss Lyman thought, as she looked at the two white figures there in the circle of firelight which they could not see.

Red Bird took a fierce breath and began.

"Jimmie, I 've just lied an' lied to you, kid. I can't see a bit more 'n you ; my eyes was ruined when I was home Christmas an' I been lyin' to you ever since, an' I — "

But Jimmie cut him short all in a breath.

"Why — why, Red Bird," he cried, stuttering, and stumbling over his words in his

haste to get them out, "why, *that* don't matter — I — I knowed all the time you could n't see. I knowed it right off — soon as ever you come back."

Red Bird shot up straight and furious.

"Why, you doggoned little liar!" he cried. "If you knowed, what made you go on actin' like you thought I could see so good!"

Jimmie winced away from his hero's wrath, but he stumbled bravely on, a faithful little Jonathan.

"Well — well, you see, Red Bird, I sort of — sort of knowed you hated awful bad bein' sure 'nough blind — you 'd hate it maybe sort of worse 'n a fella would that 'd allers been that away, — an' so when you kept er actin' like you could see better 'n ever, I thought you 'd kind of — kind of like it if I acted that away too. An' — an' I 'lowed it did n't matter what *I* did 'cause *my* name ain't George Washington, it 's just Jimmie, an' I ain't got no folks to keer how I act. Maybe I 'll go to Hell for it," he pursued calmly, — having evidently faced

this possibility in his small mind, — "but" said Just Jimmie quite simply, "course a fella would n't mind that if — if it would make it any better for — for the fella he — he keered erbout." And after a moment he added "Sort of," vaguely, which two little last words were wholly irrelevant and were merely thrown in as a cover to his shyness.

"But 'course," he resumed, "when I heard all this George Washington truth talk, why — why I knowed then you 'd *have* to tell, Red Bird, 'cause of your name."

Suddenly Miss Lyman remembered the picture of Jimmie's agonized little figure during Red Bird's song. So he had known all along what his friend was facing. She wondered how much else Just Jimmie knew back there behind those blind eyes of his.

"Jimmie," Red Bird gasped presently, "it 's awful! Bein' sure 'nough blind is just — just *awful!*"

He had not admitted this to Miss Lyman.

Jimmie started as though he had been stung and his hands fell to patting the

other's head with acute awkward tenderness.

"Why — why, Red Bird, it — it ain't really so awful after a fella gits used to it," he stuttered. "It 's — it 's just 'cause you ain't really used to it yet. Why — why," he stumbled — he whose sight had been wiped out by Infant Ophthalmia at the age of two weeks — "why, I recollect *I* felt just like you do when I first went blind, but *now* — why — why now I kind of like it," he protested valiantly. "Why — er — " his little gray-mouse face with its disfigured eyes waved about as he hunted desperately for the advantages of being blind — "Why, Red Bird, you an' me is awful bad fellas, an' maybe if we could see we 'd do somepun 'at 'ud git us locked up in the penitentiary. An' — an' anyhow, er fella don't want to be bothered with havin' to see such a heap of things all the time, an' so — an' so — so — bein' blind is — is kind of nice and *quiet*," he brought out triumphantly at last.

"Gee!" Red Bird retorted in a muffled

voice, "you're mighty right, your name ain't George Washington. But all the same you're a awful good little kid."

He reached out one moist tear-dabbled hand, and finding Jimmie's, hugged it close, as though trusting to its small wise strength to guide him along that dark path which the other knew so well.

Suddenly a fresh inspiration came to Jimmie, and he gave a joyous squirm, like an ingratiating puppy.

"Red Bird," he said, "the fellas is goin' to be awful mad when you tell 'em how you've fooled 'em. I would n't be s'prised if you — if you had to lick quite a few of 'em."

A swift delighted stiffening up of muscle animated Red Bird.

"Why — that's so," he cried in happy anticipation. "I just b'lieve that's so, kid. An' I can fight, can't I?" he demanded wistfully.

At last Just Jimmie felt himself upon familiar ground, and took his cue joyfully.

"Fight? Great snakes! Red Bird! I just everlastin'ly bet you kin! Why, why there ain't er boy in school you can't lick! Yes, sir-ee, fellas," he proclaimed, addressing the whole school in imagination, "yes, sir! Red Bird he certainly *kin* fight!"

IV

THE LITTLE SIGN FOR FRIEND

NOW, there are diversities of gifts, even in a school for deaf children. There was Everett Dwight, for instance, who, in the modeling class, always specialized in pigs — most engaging pigs, with expressively cocked ears, and tails of an unbelievable curliness. There was little Mary Logan, who had learned to say, "I know," long before any of the other children in her class, and who said it upon all occasions, in season and out. And again, there was great awkward Christopher Adams who could make grotesque wooden snakes. But to Charlie Webster, — little old Webster, as all the teachers called him in sheer affection, or "W-on-the-eyes," as his sign went among the deaf children, for a reason which has been explained elsewhere, — to him was the gift for friendship.

From what enchanted source had a little

deaf boy of nine drawn this miracle of affection that bubbled forth to enrich every new acquaintanceship? At Lomax he was friends with every one, — high and low, black and white, deaf and blind, — and his hands were forever flying together to form the little sign for friend, which is made in the deaf language by locking the forefingers first in one direction and then in the other; and by this sign he conquered.

"Certainly it takes little old Webster to be friends with Christopher Adams," Miss Evans, one of the teachers, sighed as her mind's eye presented the picture of the latter's awkward shambling figure, and his dumb bewildered face.

Christopher Adams was a great lumbering deaf mute of nineteen, sent to school years too late, and so homesick and confused and unhappy, and with a mind so long neglected, that he was well-nigh unteachable.

"You should have let us have him years ago," Mr. Lincoln, the Superintendent of Lomax, had cried reproachfully when

Christopher's father had brought him to school. The boy's agonized glance flickered about the unfamiliar room, alighting here and there, on the bookcases, the typewriter, the desk, then fled back to his father's face to cling there in desperate question. His body was that of a man almost six feet tall, but the spirit of childhood, like a captive Ariel, looked forth from the dark tragic eyes, terrified by the unknown, and caught so fast in its prison of deafness, that it might never give place to maturity.

"I allus 'lowed he ought to go to school," his father sighed. He was a little, shabby, discouraged man from the backwoods of Lupin County. "But his mammy said she wa'n't agoin' to have her afflicted child sent among strangers. But this fall we heard you was teachin' deef children to talk, so I got her persuaded to let me bring Chrissy."

"But your boy is so old—" Mr. Lincoln broke off, hunting for the kindest words; but the little man's fear caught him up sharply.

"You mean — you mean my boy can't learn?"

As Mr. Lincoln hesitated, Charlie Webster pushed open the study door, his dancing eyes asking permission to enter, while his fingers signed a request for some writing paper. Mr. Lincoln, however, shook his head over the signs.

"You must speak," he commanded.

And little old Webster, who believed with all his small soul in articulation for deaf children, flung back his head obediently, and, though somewhat embarrassed by the presence of strangers, made a buoyant attempt to control his stubborn lips.

"Ples' gif me —" He paused, his vocabulary being as yet very limited, and, touching his forehead, and flinging his hand out, made the sign for "I don't know."

"Some paper," Mr. Lincoln prompted him.

"Ples' gif me som' paper," Webster repeated, reading the words from the other's lips and beaming with excitement.

And when Mr. Lincoln complied, he

said, "Thank you," pressing his finger to the side of his nose, as he always did to be sure that the vibration was right; flashed his engaging smile once more upon every one, and departed.

"Why, he's a-talkin'!" Mr. Adams burst out in great excitement. "He's a-talkin' an' he's deef, ain't he? Why can't my boy learn good as him?"

"Because your boy has been kept from school too long. However," Mr. Lincoln went on kindly, "perhaps we can give him a little speech even yet. And at any rate, if he is contented here" — he glanced rather doubtfully at the terror in Christopher's eyes — "we can at least teach him a trade, and he will pick up the sign language."

But the little man's slow mind was working over the Superintendent's earlier remark.

"He oughter of come sooner — when they's little they kin learn better." His thin jaws worked a moment uncertainly; then, "I reckon," he began, — but sud-

denly caught himself up. "No — no," he mumbled, his words trailing off to silence.

Later that morning Mr. Lincoln was startled by an agonized cry, and the sight of a great body flashing past his study window. Rushing out to the porch, he found Mr. Bennet, the supervisor of the deaf boys, struggling to calm Christopher Adams.

"He 's just realized that his father has left him here," the former gasped.

With a sudden inspiration of hope, Christopher tore himself free from the supervisor and dashed away to Mr. Lincoln's study. His father was not there. He fled back again to the front yard — nor was he there either. Then to the schoolrooms, the dormitories, the carpenter's shop, the yard again, — to all the places they had visited together, — but his father was in none of them. His agonized eyes questioned Mr. Lincoln's face for a moment, as desperate as those of a lost dog. Then he was off again, running down the path and through the school gates and away to the railroad station, Mr. Lincoln and the supervisor in

pursuit. He reached the station just as the little jerky local train was pulling out. His father was on the rear platform. Christopher caught sight of him and, screaming inarticulately and waving wild arms, plunged after the train. On the platform, the little man burst into a babble of incoherent, futile words, the tears raining down his cheeks, his hands trying to form reassuring signs.

"Don't be skeered, son," he cried. "They ain't goin' ter hurt ye. Don't be skeered, honey! Pappy 'll be back for ye in the spring. Don't — son — "

Quickening its pace, the train swept away around a bend and the father, still waving his hands and crying useless words to his son's deaf ears, was snatched away out of sight. Christopher stood a blank moment, staring down the track. Then he flung his arms high above his head, and pitched over upon the ties.

The next morning in school, little Hiram Cobb engaged in a desperate struggle with the written word — always so difficult to deaf children who have never heard it spoken

— and produced the following : " We have a new boy. He is big. He is never to school. He is very a savage." He was extremely proud of this effusion, for it had required time and patience and a thrust-out tongue to achieve it, and moreover, it contained three capital H's which were more beautiful than any he had ever before accomplished. He showed it to Charlie Webster at recess, but little old Webster promptly tore the neatly written page to shreds ; upon which they fought, Hiram sustaining a skinned knuckle and sprained finger, and Webster a swollen lip. Afterwards, Webster sought out Christopher Adams where he sat in one corner bowed over in utter misery, and related to him on his fingers the whole history of the battle, — how Hiram had written bad things about Christopher ; how he, Webster, had torn them up ; and how they had fought. With extraordinary vividness of gesture, the incidents flowed from Webster's fingers in a series of sharp pictures. The signs were utterly unintelligible to Christopher, of course, and he had not

the least idea what it was all about; but no one could have the entire attention of little old Webster's engaging personality without responding somewhat to it, and when he finished his narrative with a fine flourishing defiance of the whole world, and then, pointing to Christopher and himself, locked his fingers together in the little sign for friend, the agonized look of Christopher's face relaxed faintly and he presented the other with his apple which he had been too unhappy to eat. Webster accepted the apple, — though he had already devoured two, — for he was well aware that the game of friendship should not be played with all the favors coming from one side, and any way fighting always made him hungry.

After the first days of frantic bewilderment, and constant attempts to run away, Christopher settled down to a stunned acquiescence. He was docile enough, and appeared to be trying with his groping mind to discover what it was all about; but it was infinitely difficult to get into touch with the imprisoned Ariel of his soul. Having never

been to school, the spoken and written word was, of course, wholly unintelligible to him; nor did the sign language which all the deaf children used in their play hours, help him much more, for their signs were not like the ones that he had himself made up for his own use at home. Mr. Lincoln never saw his lumbering figure towering up in the class of little beginners of six and seven, nor looked into his dazed, unhappy face, without a contraction of rage for the lost years.

"If I had my way, I'd hang, draw, and quarter every parent who keeps his deaf or blind child at home from school," he commented grimly.

Moreover, Christopher, from lack of training, was full of uncouth habits, inarticulate sounds, strange gestures and grimaces which made him the continual butt of the other children. Against the older boys he had no hesitancy in using his fists; but it had evidently been drilled into him at home that he must never put forth his great strength against any one smaller than himself, and once his slow mind had closed upon

a command, it apparently never opened to any exceptions. The astonishing fact developed that this great giant would run away from the little boys; would, if tortured too far, even burst into frantic tears rather than turn and defend himself.

Little Hiram Cobb was the first to discover this. He treasured a resentment against Christopher as having been the cause of the destruction of his capital H's, and one cold, sleeting day, just before Christmas, when the boys were all collected in the gymnasium at playtime, he caught up a bean bag and, running across to where Christopher leaned against the wall, flung it violently in his face, and scuttled away. Glancing back, however, what was his astonishment to discover that Christopher was running from him. With a squeal of joy, he caught up more bean bags and started in hot pursuit. Other little boys joined in. With inarticulate cries, they harried their victim all across the gymnasium, pelting him with the bags. The older boys stopped their games to shout with

laughter at the spectacle of the biggest boy in school fleeing from assailants who barely reached to his waist. Driven mad by the laughter, Christopher made a dash for the door to escape, but the big boys joined forces and, blocking his way, thrust him back to his tormentors. The whole room rocked with laughter, and wild applause.

Christopher, who knew no defense save his fists, plunged at one big, laughing boy after another. But he could not fight them all, and he must not fight the little ones. Crimson, bewildered, frantic, pelted by the bean bags, he rushed first in one direction, then in another, now attacking a big boy, now fleeing from a little one. The room reeled before his distracted eyes, full of taunting gesticulating boys, all laughing at him, all against him. He had no language of either word or gesture. He did not know why he had been brought to this terrible place; he was one against sixty. All the agony, and confusion, and desperation of the past months rushed upon him. He dropped his clenched fists. A bag struck him on the

head; another in his bewildered face. He turned and, with the rabble still at his heels, stumbled blindly over to one corner of the gymnasium, and there, crouching down, turned his face to the wall, and burst into helpless tears, an uncouth, weeping giant, with the little boys shouting with laughter and pelting him.

Suddenly Webster was among them. But such a Webster! Eyes flashing; cheeks on fire; fists clinched. He made short work of Hiram Cobb and his like. Then he turned upon the big boys, and poured forth a furious speech with his hands.

"Shame! Shame!" his hand flung the word at them, and his eyes blazed it. "All you boys on one! Shame! Not one of you big enough to fight him alone! Shame on you! Shame on you!"

The sign for shame is sufficiently expressive in itself, but Webster flung into it such an impassioned scorn and contempt, such accusation, that all the culprits, turning away, began to pretend an elaborate interest in boxing gloves, dumb-bells, vaulting

horses, or anything that would shield them from the blazing eyes of one accusing little boy.

Then little old Webster stooped down to Christopher. What gift of insight bestowed upon him the understanding and tenderness of a mother? With an infinite compassion — a compassion that realized in his own little body all the other's mortification — he found Christopher's cap for him; smoothed his disheveled hair, dusted his coat with eager, sorry hands, and then, grunting all the while little inarticulate sounds of sympathy — which neither he nor Christopher could hear — he drew the broken, sobbing giant to his feet, and trying with his inadequately small body to shield his friend from the eyes of the other boys, he led him away from the scene of his humiliation.

The next day Christopher Adams was gone. At some time when the night-watchman was in another part of the building, he had slipped out and away into the open country. It was Christmas Day that he went, and while all the school made merry

with Christmas trees and festivities, Mr. Lincoln was scouring the country and telephoning far and wide. At dusk they caught him. He was walking straight down the railroad track, his eyes wide and far away, picturing some distant desired spot. At the end of the day, when every other child was replete with nuts and candy and Christmas cheer, Christopher, tired and footsore and frustrated, limped into the deaf boys' sitting-room, and sinking into a chair, put his head down on the table in front of him, and not even Webster with all his array of toys could rouse him from his hopeless despair. So, after a time, little old Webster desisted, and just sat quietly by his side, not trying to do anything, simply assuring him of his sympathy by his loyal presence.

Once when Christopher looked up for a moment, Webster crooked his forefingers together in the sign for friend. A faint bleak smile went over the other's face, and his clumsy fingers copied the little sign.

The winter swung into the New Year.

The busy schooldays went by, treading fast upon one another's heels, and in all the pressure of work, and the care of over two hundred children, it was not possible to give Christopher the individual attention that his case required. He did, it is true, begin to learn a little, and to pick up a few signs, but his face had settled to a strained and baffled look as if his whole soul were striving to understand, and could not because the doors had been closed too long. The teachers regarded him always with a vague foreboding. It did not seem possible that all the smouldering unhappiness which his eyes showed would not flame out into tragedy somewhere, somehow. Had it been possible for him to have a special teacher, things might have been different. But this the parents could not afford, and the school funds were too limited for it to be thought of, much as Mr. Lincoln desired it.

But, as has been said, there are diversities of gifts, and even Christopher had his. He could make snakes. They were whittled bits of wood, painted black, and mottled,

joined by stout thread, and so cunningly balanced that when grasped by the middle they would writhe and twist and lash themselves from side to side in a truly snake-like and repulsive manner. Christopher had brought one of these snakes to school with him, — apparently his only treasure, — and there was not a deaf girl at Lomax who did not shudder at the sight of it, or a deaf boy who did not covet it. Nothing would induce Christopher to part with it, but one day he set to work in the carpenter's shop to fashion a similar one, indicating by signs that the new snake was to be for Webster. He was a slow worker, with his untrained mind and clumsy fingers, but his whole soul went into the task, and as he worked, he chuckled and grimaced happily to himself.

It was something conceived by his brain, brought to birth by his hands, and destined for his friend, so heart and brain and hand were all at work together, and in the fashioning of that snake, he knew his first happy moments at school. In the midst of all the

baffled bewilderment which he felt for his other tasks, here was something he could do; something, moreover, which no one else in the school could do. He began to improve, to lose a little of his strained look, and in the respect which his snake gained for him, the inhibiting mortification which he had suffered from being placed with the little boys lifted somewhat. Because he could do one thing well, he began to do everything a little better.

Through the long, bewildering hours of study, his mind warmed itself with pictures of the carpenter shop and the treasure it held. Lacking language, his thoughts made pictures and presented sensations with extraordinary clearness. When he thought of the consummation of his task — the presentation of the snake to Charlie Webster — he saw the whole picture of the sunlighted workroom with its group of admiring boys; he could smell the shavings and sawdust, could feel the snake in his grasp, and could see Webster's little eager up-turned face; while the delight of doing

something for his friend ran in warm anticipation through his whole being.

At last, the snake was finished. His soul shining through his face, Christopher lifted the hideous thing from the bench and held it out to Webster. Alas! in the moment that his tribute to their friendship was changing hands, Hiram Cobb, in sheer bravado, leaped forward, snatched the snake away, wrung it to bits, and flung the fragments in the stove. With a choking sound that was half a roar and half a sob, Christopher's great fist shot out, and Hiram went down, limp and unconscious. The other boys rushed up, dragging Christopher back, accusing him with wild gesticulations, and pointing down at Hiram.

Struggling, and panting, and horrified, all the bubble of his happiness shattered, Christopher stared for a moment at the boy at his feet. Then, wrenching himself free, he flung his arms up before his face and fled away into the snow-covered country, sobbing and panting, and running.

An excited company of boys carried

Hiram to the hospital, and there, after a time, he regained consciousness, very limp and frightened, but not seriously hurt.

But Christopher was gone, and another fact was revealed. Charlie Webster was gone also. When? Where? No one knew. One of the big deaf boys remembered seeing him in the group that carried Hiram to the hospital, and remembered that as soon as Hiram opened his eyes, and showed signs of being alive, Webster had rushed from the room.

Mr. Lincoln had been absent from the school at the time and it was late when he returned. Fortunately, though the ground was covered with snow, a thaw had set in and it was not cold.

"That little old Webster's gone after Christopher," Mr. Lincoln said. "And Christopher 'll make straight down the railroad track for home, and neither of them can hear a train."

For hours he drove along the country road, a full moon overhead, and on his right hand the black lines of the railroad track stretching into the distance. But the boys

had a long start of him, and dawn came and then full morning before at last he found them. Rounding a bend in the road, he came upon a little appalled huddle of humanity caught together in the fellowship of disaster. The gray winter landscape surrounded them; the uncaring sky arched overhead, and beside them lay the sinister line of the railroad.

They were all there: Christopher's father and mother; his little white-faced brothers and sisters; a few neighbors hastily collected; the track-walker; the station agent. Charlie Webster was there too, and Christopher was there. At least, his body was. The track-walker had found them: Christopher lying where the train had flung him, and Webster beside him, weeping and cold and terrified, but keeping faithful watch over his friend. It had happened not far from Christopher's home. Neighbors had recognized him and sent the tragic word to his parents.

Mr. Lincoln went over and looked down at the body, and suddenly his eyes blurred.

The heavy dead fingers were locked tight in the little sign for friend, and he knew that at the last Christopher had looked into the face of one person whom he loved. Perhaps, too, Webster had reached him in time to make him understand that he had not killed the boy he had struck, for the face turned up to the bleak daylight had lost its terrified bewilderment, and in his death Christopher Adams looked as though he could at last hear and understand, and was free.

From her place beside her boy Christopher's mother rose up from her knees and confronted Mr. Lincoln. She was a gaunt mountain woman, and her face was terrible.

"Look!" she cried, "look at my son!" and spread her shaking hands out over the body at her feet. "I sent you my boy — I trusted him to you. I sent him away well and strong, and *now* — Here he comes runnin' and runnin' home to his mammy through the dark and the cold."

With a sharp sob, she broke off and,

flinging herself down, began touching the great broken body here and there, tending it softly, pushing the hair from the forehead, brushing the coat, and with her coarse apron wiping the face.

"You knowed yer mammy 'd take keer of you, did n't yer, little son?" she whispered. "You was runnin' home through ther dark to yer mammy, was n't you? Oh!" she burst out, distractedly, "it 's er *lie!* It 's all er lie, I tell yer! Deef children *can't* learn! It 's er lie they tell ter git 'em fooled erway from their mammies. *It 's er lie! Er lie!*"

"Ca'line, they *kin* learn when they 's little!" All at once her husband who had been weeping beside his son stopped crying. "They *kin* learn when they 's little, Ca'line!" he persisted, his voice sharp with pleading. "Make him talk — show her!" he commanded suddenly, whirling upon Mr. Lincoln and pointing to Webster. "Make that there little feller talk."

Mr. Lincoln hesitated. It seemed too cruel to show the mother what her misdi-

rected love and ignorance had cost her son; but there was such a wrung intensity in the little man's voice, and in his tear-disfigured face, and he cried so insistently, "Make him talk! make him talk!" that the Superintendent could not but comply. Drawing Webster over to him, he put him through some of his familiar questions.

"How old are you? What is your name? Have you a sister? Have you a brother?"

And putting his small cold hands into Mr. Lincoln's, and raising his quivering face to the latter's, Webster made a faithful attempt to control his voice. He was white and distraught, and his eyes wavered constantly in the direction of his dead friend, but obedient as always, he did his best.

"I am ten years ou'ld. I haf no sister. I haf no bro'ther." His replies came as he read the questions from the Superintendent's lips.

"I *told* you they could learn if they was sent to school early! I told you they could learn, Ca'line!" the little man's sobbing and pleading broke out.

"He ain't deef! That ain't er deef child like mine!" she cried passionately.

"He is stone deaf, he can't hear a word," Mr. Lincoln returned.

She looked at Webster a moment longer as he went patiently on through his sentences, and at last conviction grew in her eyes.

"Sonny! Sonny!" she cried, putting her face down close to Christopher's, and caressing him pitifully, "O little son, I reckon yer mammy's love ruined yer! I would n't let you go to school — I thought nobody could do for you like yer mammy — O sonny —"

Suddenly, little old Webster broke away from Mr. Lincoln and going over, touched the mother, and, pointing to Christopher's locked hands, copied the sign of the dead fingers.

"Fr-r-riend," he said, carefully, — it was a word he had early learned to say, — "my fr-r-riend," and burst into tears.

Answering tears flashed up in the mother's passionate eyes. "Was he your friend,

little honey?" she said, brokenly, and hid her face in her apron.

"Ca'line they *kin* learn when they 's little," her husband's distracted pleading began again.

She silenced him with a gesture, and staggering blindly to her feet, went over to her huddled group of children, and drew from the midst of them a beautiful sturdy little boy of about six years.

"Take him!" she panted. "Take him 'fore his mammy's love ruins *him* too—"

"*Another* deaf child!" Mr. Lincoln cried.

"Yes—yes! My little baby child! My oldest an' my youngest, both deef. I 'lowed never to let my baby go, but *now*—" A rush of tears cut her short. "Mammy 's got to let you go—she 's got to let her baby go," she sobbed to the child. Taking his small hand she placed it in Webster's. "You be good to him—you learn him, honey," she implored.

Nobody ever called on little old Webster in vain. His stricken face relaxed now into

a smile, greeting this new friendship that had flowered out of the one so tragically broken. The little boy hung back a moment, his big mute eyes questioning the other. Then, suddenly, his face broke into a copy of Webster's own smile, he made a little chuckling inarticulate sound, and snuggled his small body confidingly up against the other.

And little old Webster, all unconscious that he had been the means of rescuing this child from one of the most pathetic lives which the world has to offer, — that of an uneducated deaf mute, — took the little boy's soft fingers and began at once to shape them into the sign that Christopher's had died in — the little sign for friend.

V

SOMETHING BIG, LIKE RED BIRD

GEE!" Red Bird complained, "I don't see what it had to go an' rain on a *Sunday* afternoon for!"

"Just — just when we was goin' over to the Big Spring, too," Jimmie Little's rather wavering voice piped in. "An' — an' I was goin' to git 'em to put me somewheres where I could n't hit nobody, an' then I was goin' to throw rocks, an' — an' throw rocks, an' *throw* rocks, just *all* the afternoon."

The very thought made him twist his little blind face from side to side in excitement. "Just Jimmie" he always asserted that he was. "'Cause — 'cause, you know," he was wont to explain, "I was raised in the Poor House down in Lupin County an' never heard 'em say who my folks was, an' they never *did* call me nothin' but just Jimmie."

Looking at his very small and wizened

person of eight years, his hearers might have been tempted to doubt the ability of the Lupin County Poor House to grow little blind boys, whatever else they might "raise" successfully there.

He and Red Bird, Just Jimmie's running mate and adored hero, were seated by the open window of the blind boys' sitting-room, and were listening to the purr of the spring rain in the courtyard, and to the monotonous slip-slop of the dripping eaves.

"Shall I read to you?" suggested Miss Lyman, the matron for the blind boys, happening upon them just then, and struck by their dejected attitudes.

"Is it sump'n 'bout fightin'?" Red Bird demanded with a languid interest.

"Oh, yes! A book full of fighting," she promised; and, taking them up to her room, she unlocked the doors of romance for them with the magic key of the *Boys' Froissart*, and after the reading was over she told them, from her memory of an old quaintly illustrated copy of the original, how the

Bishop of Lincoln and certain gallant gentlemen had resolved to wear a black patch over one eye until they should have performed some deed of chivalry. At that Red Bird's imagination blazed up.

"Jimmie, let's you an' me do it!" he cried. "Let's you an' me wear patches like the Bishop of Lincoln an' them other fellas 'til *we've* done sump'n noble, too!"

"Let's!" Jimmie assented joyfully (he always assented to everything Red Bird proposed). "But, Red Bird, we got to wear our patches over our y'ears." (Just Jimmie's ear was always prefixed by a *y*.) "'Cause — 'cause 'course there ain't no sense in *our* wearin' patches over our *eyes!*"

"An' we got to have a beautiful lady to sort of pay our deeds to," his running mate added.

This gave them pause until Red Bird suggested Miss Lyman.

"Aire — aire you the fairest lady in the land?" Jimmie demanded in Froissart diction, somewhat flavored by Lupin County.

Miss Lyman hastily denied any such distinction.

"'Course she'd *say* she was n't," Red Bird reproved Jimmie. "Let me feel," he added imperiously.

With a butterfly touch his fingers quested her smooth plump cheeks, her hair — which was indeed very soft and thick — and her crisp and fresh Sunday blouse; also he sniffed the general clean fragrance of orris-root, and pronounced the whole good.

"Well," he said, "you may n't *look* pretty, but *we* don't care nothin' 't all 'bout that so long as you *feel* pretty."

Thus she was accepted as their liege lady, and at their request accoutred them with their patches. And if the patches were made from the tops of the fair lady's discarded stockings — Oh, well, it is a rude reality that stares too closely at romance.

Of course Red Bird was the first to get his patch off, though even he wore it for a week.

He and Jimmie came nightly to Miss Lyman's room to have her review their

day's record, and see if there was anything in it sufficiently noble to justify the removal of a patch. That is to say, they reviewed Red Bird's. Just Jimmie never appeared to have anything remarkable to show on his own account, but he could become almost lyrical over Red Bird's achievements. They were both sure Miss Lyman would unpatch the latter the day he fought and licked Edward Saunders, a boy almost two years older than Red Bird. Strangely enough, however, she did not. She even went so far as to assert that, as Edward had merely stumbled over Red Bird's foot by accident, she would have considered it more worthy the removal of a patch, had Red Bird refrained from the licking. And the boys were forced to admit in private that even the fairest ladies had strange ideas.

But at last Fate favored Red Bird.

He was up in the blind boys' dormitory one day at playtime. Spring was in the air and the window was open. Red Bird went over to it to feel the wind on his cheeks, and to listen to the myriad sounds which

the playground gave up: the shouts and laughter of the blind children; the slurring scuffle of a company of deaf boys marking time as they drilled in the brick courtyard below; and from around on the girls' side the plaintive notes of little Phœbe West's horn. As he leaned there he turned a large orange — a windfall from his friend Mr. Heartwell, the deaf baker of the school — in his hands, essaying little tentative nibbles at it, and trying to make up his mind as to the most delightful way of eating it. Should he bite a hole in it then and there and suck it dry? Or should he peel it, divide it into segments, and, hunting up Jimmie, do the generous thing and divide it with him? Or again — sudden and delightful inspiration — suppose he induced Jimmie to invest that penny he had been hoarding so long, in a stick of lemon candy, and then they shared the orange, imbibing it through the candy, suck and suck about, a linked sweetness long drawn out. Fired by this plan, he was just turning away, when something came avalanching down the roof and brought

up in the wide gutter just outside his window. Red Bird jumped back. It was so near, so strange. What could it be?

"Who you?" he demanded, backing farther away.

There was no answer, but there was the sound of scrambling feet against the tin of the gutter, accompanied by certain alarming grunts and puffs.

"Who you?" Red Bird repeated more sharply.

The scuffling and scrambling seemed very near, and the friendly sounds of the playground very far away. He was just turning to scuttle off downstairs to the safe companionship of the other boys, when he bethought him of his patch. Would the Bishop of Lincoln and his gallant friends have run away, even from a puffing creature that they could not see, and that would not speak? Not likely. Again he approached the window.

"Lady," he said, "see here your knight who will not fail to die for you."

For, of course, the sounds *might* be made

by a damsel in distress, and that was the way Sir John of Hainault had addressed the fugitive Queen of England. Red Bird said the words very fast, half under his breath, for, of course, there was always the chance of its being a grown-up who would n't understand, and who might laugh.

If it were a distressed lady she should answer as the Queen had to Sir John, "Sir, I find in you more kindness and comfort than in all the world besides."

Red Bird strained his ears for these flattering sentences. They failed to come, but suddenly, in the courtyard below, some one screamed piercingly, "*Look!* Oh, my goodness! Look at that little deaf boy up there in that gutter! He 'll fall — he 'll break his neck!"

There followed the frantic sound of running feet, but they were two flights of stairs away, and any moment that little boy, who was n't more than six years old, might miss his footing and — the courtyard three stories below was paved with brick.

"Here you —" Red Bird cried plung-

ing wildly for the window. Immediately, he heard the child edging out of reach along the gutter. Goodness! that was no way to go about rescuing him! Then a sudden inspiration flashed upon Red Bird. How he came to think of it he never knew. He said afterwards that sump'n sort er snapped in his head, and that was as near as he ever came to explaining it. He approached the window cautiously and held out the tempting orange. The deaf child did not move, this time. Red Bird put the orange to his lips and made as if to eat it, then held it out again, and now he heard the little boy scuffling slowly nearer. At his back he felt the room full of tense grown-up watchers.

"That's right, Red Bird, that's right," Mr. Lincoln's voice encouraged him.

Gradually, as he heard the little boy approach he withdrew farther into the room, and at last with a final puff and scramble the child climbed over the sill and jumped down to safety, his eager hands upon Red Bird's orange.

The grown-ups swooped forward and

caught him fast, and Mr. Lincoln's hand fell upon Red Bird's shoulder.

"Good boy!" he cried in a somewhat shaken tone. "Good boy!"

That night Miss Lyman held a party in her room to celebrate the removal of Red Bird's patch. The party was small but very select. The invited guests were Red Bird, Just Jimmie, W-on-the-Eyes, and the little rescued deaf boy. The latter had not the slightest idea of what it was all about, and not having yet learned to talk, he could not ask questions. W-on-the-Eyes was the sign by which Charlie Webster, a little deaf boy of ten, was known to all the other deaf children of the school. He was invited because Benny Adams — the explorer of the gutter — was his especial charge, Benny's mother having intrusted him to Webster when she sent him to school. Ever since his arrival, Webster, and indeed the whole deaf department, had found their hands full. He was as likely to appear on the ridgepole as in the schoolroom, and he had thrown the whole corps of matrons into a state of con-

sternation and wild telephoning to doctors by calmly eating a moth-ball. Like the Elephant's Child in the *Just So Stories*, he suffered from an "insatiable curiosity"; and not being able to voice any of his questions, when touch and sight failed, he very naturally had recourse to taste for the furtherance of his inquiries. Doubtless the eating of the moth-ball satisfied his mind on that point at least. Probably also he had derived further information from his explorations that afternoon of the roof and gutter outside the blind boys' dormitory.

Charlie Webster made on his behalf a very beautiful speech of thanks to Red Bird. He had to make the speech on his fingers, but Red Bird felt his hands and understood some of his signs, and Miss Lyman interpreted the rest for him. Altogether it was a great occasion. Everybody's heart overflowed with good feeling and good cheer, and Just Jimmie, who had nearly burst with pride over his hero's achievement, burned to imitate him. He might have taken his patch off over and over again for proficiency

in his lessons; but this he scorned to do. To his mind there was nothing romantic in being able to spell conscientious, or in repeating the names of all the presidents in order. For its removal that patch called for the romantic and gallant ; or, as he himself put it, "some kind er fightin'," or "sump'n *big* like what Red Bird done."

There came at last, however, a heavenly warm spring Sunday, when one of the teachers, assisted by a couple of pupils who could see a little, took all the blind boys over to the Big Spring, — a long happy ramble through the perfumed woods, — and when the desire of Just Jimmie's heart in the matter of throwing stones was realized.

They placed him by the side of a creek, which afforded an unlimited supply of stones, and where there was a clear space ahead with no danger of hitting any one, and here he did indeed throw rocks, and throw rocks, and *throw* rocks, just all the afternoon. It was pure joy, but finally even his devoted arm gave out. He cuddled down

on the bank to rest "jus' er minute" as he specified to himself, but in reality to fall fast asleep. He had dropped down, as it happened, behind a fallen tree, so that the teacher, when she came to gather her flock together, failed to see him, and supposed he was on in front with Red Bird. And so, when Just Jimmie sailed up to consciousness once more, the woods were still and deserted and he knew himself all alone. In the general scramble of life, however, he was rather used to being overlooked. If he philosophized about it at all he probably put it down to the score of his having no folks, and coming from the Lupin County Poor House; moreover, he had found that, given time, people usually remembered his existence. Therefore he had no doubt that some one would presently return for him. In the meantime, this out-of-door world still lent a delightful warmth to his small body, and brought intoxicating spring perfumes to his nostrils. Also, here were the stones and the creek again, with his good right arm refreshed by sleep, and the heart of Just

Jimmie asked no more. Sometimes the stones went into the deep water with a full round "plup"; sometimes they landed in the shallows, making a pleasant sharp splash; sometimes — oh, joy! — they flew clear across the creek and greeted the ear with a delightful clip-clap, as they skipped on the stones on the other side; and each time Jimmie jumped up and down, and clapped his hands and gave vent to extraordinarily gleeful shouts of merriment.

All at once he heard a crackling sound in the bushes behind him, and knew that somebody, or something, stood there and looked at him.

After listening a moment, as no one spoke, he took the initiative.

"Aire you a cow or a person?" he demanded.

It seemed to him that the breathing was more human than animal, so he was not surprised when he heard a man's laugh. But it was the strangest laugh Jimmie had ever heard. Just the sound of laughter, with no mirth to back it.

"Do I look like a cow?" a voice demanded.

"I dunno," Just Jimmie returned. "I ain't so very sure what a cow looks like. I ain't seen one — not since I was two weeks old — an' course a fella don't recollect so awful well as fer back as that."

"Have n't seen a cow since you were two weeks old!" the voice exclaimed.

"No," said Jimmy simply, "I ain't seen nothin' since I was that old."

In his desire to explain he turned his little thin gray-mouse face, with its blind eyes, more fully in the other's direction, and the voice cried "Oh!" sharply. And then after a moment it said "Oh!" again, softly this time. "What are you doing out here all alone?" it asked after a moment.

It was a man's voice, Jimmie was sure of that, but it had a queer uncertain throb in it, that he found very disconcerting.

"I was asleep," he explained. "An' — an' so the fellas went off an' lef' me. I reckon they thought I was somewhere with Red Bird."

"But you can't stay here alone. Where do you live?"

"I 'm at Lomax. That 's where all the deaf an' blind kids goes to school," Jimmie explained. "It 's 'bout two miles from here, I reckon."

"I 'll take you back," said the man. "I 'll *have* to take you back. The other can wait."

He seemed to be arguing something out with himself.

"Oh, you need n't to bother if you have sump'n to do; they 'll send back for me after a while," Jimmie assured him.

"No — no — I 'll take you," the other returned in that nervous jerky way of his.

Jimmie was conscious of a certain odor which he had encountered in times past. Also, when he cuddled his hand sociably into the big one that closed on his, he found that, warm as the day was, and large as the hand was, the fingers nevertheless were cold and damp, and clung to his, moreover, in a desperate, twitchy way that almost hurt. Somehow the clutch of those

fingers, for all that they were so big, waked a curious protective feeling in Just Jimmie. He did not know how to express it, how to say that he was sorry, nor indeed what there was to be sorry about; but some instinct infinitely older than his eight years made him endeavor, as it were, to fling a corner of his own mantle of happiness about the other and so protect him — though what there was to protect him from, again he did not know. But as they went their way, he began a long rambling discourse on what a fine day it had been; how nice it was to be in the woods and throw stones; and how he liked the spring; and at last, inspired by his own eloquence, he drew a deep luxurious sniff of sheer contentment, and the perfume-laden air rushed through his little body and into his very soul, and "O Gee!" cried Just Jimmie happily, "I certainly *am* glad I 'm erlivin'!"

Again the man laughed, another of those sudden explosions that had no sound of laughter.

"Glad you 're living!" he cried wildly.

"Glad you 're living! I wish to God *I* was dead!"

"Oh, *that 's* just 'cause you 're gittin' over er drunk," Jimmie assured him cheerfully.

The man dropped his hand. "Good Lord!" he whispered, and Jimmie could feel his startled eyes upon him. "Good Lord!" Then, "What do *you* know about that?" he demanded.

"Oh, I smelt it on you!" Jimmie returned, crinkling his nose. "An' there was a fella at the Lupin County Poor House — that 's where I was raised — allus used to say gittin' drunk was all right if it was n't for the blue blazes next day. He said that was — was — Well," he caught himself up, "it 's er word Mr. Lincoln don't 'low none of us boys to use, but — but," — with sudden inspiration — "I 'll *spell* it for you."

Carefully his fingers formed certain letters of the manual alphabet, which he had picked up from the deaf children.

"Is that first letter an H?" the man asked.

"Yes, an' it 's er E when you put your hand like this." (Jimmie illustrated.) "An' you make a L —"

"I can guess the rest," the man broke in hastily.

"Well, that 's what the fella used to say it felt like next day," Jimmie concluded.

Suddenly the man's hand fell hard upon Jimmie's shoulder and his face stooped close to his.

"Little pal, don't *you* get drunk," his shaky voice implored. "You would n't find anything so nice again, not ever again; you — you might n't even like to be alive — not even on spring days when you could throw stones."

"Oh, I won't," Just Jimmie promised easily. "That fella at the Poor House, he give me er drink onct, but I did n't like it. Red Bird an' me, we don't keer nothin' 't all 'bout whisky."

"Thank God for that!" said the man. "If there is a God," he added.

"Why, '*course* there 's er God," cried Just Jimmie, even his tolerant little soul

shocked by such a display of sheer ignorance.

He told Red Bird afterwards that that man was the "funniest fella he ever *did* see."

"How do you know there 's a God?" the other demanded.

"Why — why, I 've knowed *that* ever since I was nothin' but a little old kid. A old nigger woman at the Poor House, she told me all erbout God."

"And of course she knew," the man returned.

"Oh, yes; she knowed all right," Just Jimmie agreed. "She did n't know so very much else, but my O! she certainly did know er heap erbout God."

"Perhaps I 've known too much else," the man said, half to himself, and his voice sounded more discouraged and far away than ever. "So you were brought up in the Poor House?" he added after a moment.

"Yes," said Jimmie. "They found me when I was a baby just throwed erway

'longside the high-road, sorter — sorter, you know, like folks does with little dogs an' — an' cats they ain't got no use for — an' they never did call me nothin' but just Jimmie, 'cause I did n't have no folks. But — but," he went on with breathless eagerness, "I know er boy that 's got *three* names. All the fellas calls him Red Bird, but that 's just a kind of a nickname, 'cause he comes from a place called Red Bird. His real name 's George — Washington — Morris" (Jimmie pronounced the words impressively), "an' — an' he 's got folks, too. Folks 'at sends him postcards. Why, *his* folks they 'll send him er postcard — why — why most *any* day."

And then his favorite topic of Red Bird thus gracefully introduced, Just Jimmie's small tongue ran happily away on a long eulogy of his friend. Once the man interrupted him to ask about the patch over his ear, and that gave him a chance to tell of his hero's extraordinary feat, and how he, too, burned to do "sump'n *big* like Red Bird."

The man vouchsafed almost no comments; but he held fast to Jimmie's hand, and at last they came to Lomax.

"I—I guess maybe I'd better tell Mr. Lincoln I'm back," Jimmie said, conscientiously.

The man said he would like to see Mr. Lincoln, too, so they went into the study together. Jimmie liked to go there. The place always held a warm atmosphere of friendliness, and moreover, he liked the smell of books, and the pleasant whiff one got of typewriter ink, and other exciting smells which always conveyed so much to his keen little nose.

He could not, of course, see anything of what passed between the two men, but he heard it all.

"I found this little chap out in the woods all alone, and so I brought him home," the strange man said in that queer shaky voice of his.

And after Mr. Lincoln had thanked him he went on again. The words seemed hard to say, and indeed every now and then they

stumbled and fell away altogether into silence.

"He and I had a little talk and — and" — here the voice failed temporarily — "and I'd like you to take *this*." (Jimmie knew that something was changing hands.) "Look out! it's loaded," the man added sharply. After a moment the words picked up their difficult way again. "There is n't — is n't any reason for my asking you to take it except — well, there is n't any one else for me to give it to, and somehow I wanted to give it to some one — I thought I was down and out — A lot of things had happened." (Jimmie could hear him swallow chokingly.) "Those woods seemed as good a place as any to do it in. They — they were" — the voice stopped altogether for a moment — "they were quiet, and nobody would recognize me round here — I'd have dropped out without bothering any one — and then — *then* I came on this little chap — and — he thought I was a cow!"

The voice collapsed suddenly into laughter — that strange wild laughter of his.

"He said he did n't recollect so very well what a cow looked like — he said he had n't seen one" — Jimmie could hear the man swallow — "had n't seen one — since he was two weeks old — He came from the Lupin County Poor House — and — he said he was glad he was alive." The voice went out abruptly, and when the words came again they were barely more than a whisper. "I guess if — if Just Jimmie finds it so good to be alive — a fellow like me — ought n't to — to quit."

"Why, no; I should think not," Mr. Lincoln's voice acquiesced after a moment.

"If I had n't come on him throwing stones out there in the woods, in half an hour I 'd have been — well, been nowhere, or — or everywhere — which ever it is. But now — well, while Just Jimmie plays the game so well, I 'll not fling down my hand."

There was a short silence, and then the man went on again.

"He 's wearing that patch over one ear

until he has performed some gallant deed." (The voice was still shaky, but Just Jimmie thought this time there was a hint of real laughter in it.) "I — I think it might come off now."

"Yes," Mr. Lincoln agreed. "Yes; I think so too. Suppose you take it off."

"But — but — but I ain't done *nothin'*," Just Jimmie broke in suddenly, backing away. "Red Bird 's done sump'n, an' — an' — an' — " he was on the verge of tears over his disappointment — "an' *I* wanted to do sump'n *big* like fightin' or — or sump'n like what Red Bird done."

But the man went on fussing with his twitching fingers over the knot that secured the patch, and paying no attention whatever to Jimmie's outburst. And at last the latter's very small ear emerged.

"Why, *this* ear 's all stuffed up with cotton! I don't believe he can hear a thing with it!" the man cried.

"'*Course!*" said Just Jimmie, "it would n't be no *sense* to wear a patch if you did n't stuff up your y'ear too."

"Did Red Bird have cotton in his ear?" Mr. Lincoln demanded.

"Why — why — why — why, maybe not," Jimmie stammered, torn between truth and loyalty.

"No eyes, and no folks, and only about the size of my fist, and yet he was willing to sacrifice one ear! While I — Great Heavens!" the man burst out.

"I ain't done nothin'!" Jimmie picked up his almost tearful complaint. "It — it — ain't anything to spell, an' — an' know 'rithmetic, an' presidents' names. I want to do some kind of *fightin'* — or — or sump'n *big* like —"

Suddenly he was swept up into arms that held him convulsively.

"You tell Red Bird you've done the biggest kind of fighting to-day," the man cried, almost roughly.

For an instant Jimmie was held fast. Then he was set down again, and Mr. Lincoln put him out into the hall and shut the door so promptly that Jimmie was never sure what the sounds were the strange man

was making then; only they made him feel shivery and glad to snuggle up close to Red Bird who was waiting outside.

"Gee! that was a awful funny man," he confided to the latter. "Yes, sir! he certainly was funny, but," he added tolerantly, "somehow I kinder liked the fella."

But there was nothing in what he could tell Red Bird of the afternoon's adventure to warrant the man's assertion that Jimmie had done the biggest kind of fighting, and the boys put the statement down as just one more evidence of the "awful funniness of the fella." And why Just Jimmie's patch had been removed neither of them had the least idea.

But a queer thing began to happen. Every week after that, Jimmie received a postcard, just like the children who had fathers and mothers.

"Why — why," he announced joyfully, "Why, Red Bird, seems like *I've* got folks, too!"

"Just *one* person don't make folks," Red Bird retorted jealously.

"Well — well, may be I ain't got folks like *you*, Red Bird, but — but anyhow I got *a* folk," Just Jimmie amended happily.

VI

WHAT MR. GREY SAID

HE was the smallest blind child at Lomax. Even Jimmie Little, who looked like a small gray mouse, and who had always been regarded by the teachers as not much bigger than a minute, appeared large beside Stanislaus. He was so small, in fact, that Mr. Lincoln, the Superintendent, had declined at first to admit him.

"We don't take children under six," he had said to Stanislaus's father when the latter had brought him to Lomax, "and your little boy does n't look five yet."

"He 'll be five the twenty-second of March," the father said.

"I 'll be five ve twenty-second of March," Stanislaus echoed. He was sitting holding his cap politely between his knees, swinging his fat legs with a gay serenity, while his blind eyes stared away into the dark. He had not been paying much attention to

the conversation, being occupied with the working out of a little silent bit of rhythm by an elaborate system of leg-swings: twice out with the right foot; twice with the left; then twice together. He had found that swinging his legs helped to pass the time when grown-ups were talking. The mention of his birthday, however, brought him at once to the surface. That was because Mr. Grey had told him of a wonderful thing which would happen the day he was five. Thereafter his legs swung to the accompaniment of a happy unheard chant: —

"I 'll be five years old" (right leg out),

"I 'll be five years old" (left leg out),

"I 'll be five years old on my *birf*-day!" (Both legs in ecstatic conjunction.)

Stanislaus's father, a sad-eyed man, who, though he spoke with no accent, was evidently of emigrant extraction, looked troubled.

"My wife 's dead," he said; "an' I 'm workin' in the coal-mines, an' you know that ain't no place for a little blind child. Every one told me sure you 'd take him here."

Mr. Lincoln hesitated. "Well," he said at length, "I 'll send for Miss Lyman, — she 's the matron for the blind boys, — and if she consents to take him I 'll make no objection."

Miss Lyman appeared presently, and Mr. Lincoln explained the situation.

"But he is such a little chap," he concluded, "it seems hardly possible for us to take him."

Here, however, Stanislaus gave over his leg-swinging and took it upon himself to remonstrate.

"I *ain't* little," he said firmly. Slipping off his chair, he drew himself up very straight, and began patting himself all over. "Feel me," he urged, "dest feel me, I 'm weally big. Feel my arms," he held these chubby members out to Miss Lyman. "An' my *legs* — " he patted them — "why vere *aw*-ful big!" His serious little mouth rounded itself to amazement at the bigness of his legs.

It was beyond human nature, or at least beyond Miss Lyman's nature, to resist the

appeal of his eager voice and patting baby hands. Obediently she ran an inquiring touch over his soft body, which was still plump babyhood, not having as yet thinned to boyhood.

"Why," she said, turning gravely to Mr. Lincoln, "he does *look* rather small, but when you *feel* him, you find he is really quite big."

"Does he feel big enough for us to take?" Mr. Lincoln demanded.

"Oh, I think so!" she answered quickly, one arm slipping about the little boy's shoulders.

"An' I 'll be five ve twenty-second of March," Stanislaus threw in to overbalance the argument in his favor.

He snuggled himself confidingly against Miss Lyman, and fell to playing with the many jingling attachments of her chatelaine.

"I heard vese tinkly fings when you was comin' 'w-a-y a-w-a-y outside, 'fore you o-pened ve door," he murmured softly.

"His mother 's dead," the man explained.

"Little sister 's dead, too," Stanislaus supplemented him. "S'e token a awful bad cold so s'e could n't b'eave. I take awful bad colds, but I don't die, do I?" he demanded.

"Yes," said the man, "my baby 's dead, too. I had a woman lookin' after both kids, but she let the baby git the pneumonia."

"I fink I like you better van vat other lady," Stanislaus confided to Miss Lyman.

"Of course we can take him," Miss Lyman said hastily to Mr. Lincoln.

And thus it was that Stanislaus came to Lomax.

As has been said, he was the youngest child at school. This in itself was sufficient to set him apart from the thirty or so blind boys, but there were other things that served to distinguish him as well. His thoughts, for instance, were so different; so unexpected and whimsical; so entirely off the beaten track. Witness Mr. Grey, for instance. At his best Mr. Grey was a delightful person, but as he was of a retiring disposition, he never flowered into be-

ing save in a sympathetic atmosphere. Miss Julia, for example, never met Mr. Grey. She was one of the older teachers, whose boast it was that she never stood for any foolishness. In her not doing so, however, she was apt to go with a heavy foot over other folks' most cherished feelings. For which reason, sensitive people were inclined in her presence to retreat within themselves, sailing, as it were, with their lights blanketed. This was the reason, no doubt, why she and Mr. Grey never met.

Indeed Mr. Grey was of such an extremely shy nature that he had to be observed with the greatest delicacy. Looked at too closely, he was apt to go out like a blown candle. He lived apparently in an empty closet in the blind boys' clothes room. It is probable that he had taken up his abode there for the sake of being near Stanislaus, for as the latter was too small to be in school all the morning, he spent the rest of his time with Miss Lyman in the clothes room, where she sat and sewed on buttons, mended rips, and set patches, in a desperate endeavor

to keep her army of blind boys mended up. When the other children were about, as they usually were on Saturdays, Mr. Grey kept discreetly to himself, and his presence in the closet would never have been suspected. On the long school mornings, however, when Miss Lyman sat quietly sewing, with Stanislaus playing about, no one could be more unbending than Mr. Grey. Stanislaus would go over to the closet and open it a crack, and then he and Mr. Grey would fall into pleasant conversation. Miss Lyman, of course, could only hear Stanislaus's side of it, but he constantly repeated his friend's remarks for her benefit.

From hints which Stanislaus let fall, Miss Lyman gathered that there had once been a real Mr. Grey in the past, from which beginning the interesting personality of the closet had developed.

Mr. Grey's comments upon things and people, as repeated by Stanislaus, showed a unique turn of mind. He seemed to have a poor opinion of mankind in general, coupled with an excellent one of himself in

particular; for, retiring as he was before strangers, in the presence of friends he blossomed into an incorrigible braggart. If any one failed to do anything, Mr. Grey could always have done it, and never hesitated to say so. There was, for instance, that time when Mr. Beverly, one of the supervisors, was thrown from his horse and rather severely bruised. When informed of the incident by Stanislaus, who always gave his friend the news of the day, Mr. Grey was very scornful.

"Gwey says," Stanislaus, over by the half-open closet door, turned to announce to Miss Lyman, "'at *he* never had no horse to frow *him* yet — an' he's wid all kinds of horses. Horses wif four legs, an' horses wif five legs, —" Stanislaus had been learning to count lately, — "an' horses wif *six* legs."

Again, when Miss Lyman sighed over a particularly disreputable pair of Edward Stone's trousers, remarking that she really did not think she could patch those, she was met by the assertion, "Gwey says *he* could patch 'em. He says he ain't erfwaid

to patch nobody's pants. He could patch Eddy Stone's, a-a-n' he could patch Jimmie Nickle's, a-a-a-n' Sam Black's, an' — an' " — this last all in a hurry, and as a supreme evidence of proficiency in the art of patching — " he dest b'ieves he could patch Mr. *Lincoln's* pants ! "

But this was more than Miss Lyman could stand. " No he could n't either, for Mrs. Lincoln would n't let him," she declared, stung to retort by such unbridled claims on the part of Mr. Grey.

It is sad to relate also that Mr. Grey was a skeptic as well as a braggart, and had had, moreover, a doubtful past. This was revealed the morning after the Sunday on which Stanislaus had first encountered the Flood, the Ark, and Noah. After giving Mr. Grey on Monday morning a graphic account of the affair, — " An' Noah him went into ve ark, an' token all ve animals wif him, an' ven all ve wicked people was dwown-ed," — Stanislaus appeared to listen a moment, after which he turned to Miss Lyman.

" Gwey says," he reported, " 'at he

does n't b'ieve all ve wicked people was dwown-ed, 'cause he was a-livin' ven, an' he was a very wicked man, an' he did n't go into ve Ark, an' *he* was n't dwown-ed."

Miss Lyman might have forgiven Mr. Grey's skepticism, but he showed a tendency to incite Stanislaus to a recklessness which could not be overlooked.

None of the children were allowed to leave the school grounds without permission, but time and again Stanislaus slipped out of the gate, and was caught marching straight down the middle of the road leading to the village. This was a particularly alarming proceeding because at this point in the road automobiles were apt to put on their last crazy burst of speed before having to slow down to the sober ten miles an hour of the village limits. Indeed, one day, he was returned to the school by a white and irate automobilist.

"What do you suppose this little scoundrel did?" the man stormed. "Why, he ran out from the side of the road and *barked* at my car!"

"I was dest pertendin' I was a little puppy dog," Stanislaus murmured softly.

"Pretending you were a *puppy* dog!" roared the man. "Well, if I had n't ditched my machine — ! A *puppy dog*, indeed!"

Stanislaus was turned over to Miss Lyman for very severe chastisement. He shed bitter tears, and in the midst of them his instigator's name came out.

"G-gwey said he al'us barked at aut'-mobiles — dest barked an' barked at 'em — dest whenever he got weady," he sobbed.

"If you ever do such a dreadful thing again, I shall give you the very worst whipping you ever had," Miss Lyman scolded. "Little blind boys have got to learn to be careful where they walk."

To which Stanislaus made the astonishing reply, —

"Gwey says he dest walked anywhere he got weady when he was little — 'fore he got *his* eyes open."

That was the first hint that Miss Lyman got of it. Afterwards she and Miss Cynthia — Stanislaus's teacher — caught constant

glimpses of a curious idea that dodged in and out of the little boy's flow of talk. A queer, elusive, will-o'-the-wisp idea, caught one minute, gone the next, yet informing all the child's dreams and happy castles of the future.

At first they compared notes on the subject.

"What *do* you suppose Stanny has got into his head?" Miss Lyman demanded of Miss Cynthia. "When I told him that Kent Woodward had a little sister, he said, 'Has s'e got her eyes open yet?'"

"Yes," agreed Miss Cynthia, "and when I happened to say that Jimmie Nickle was the biggest blind boy in school, he said he must be awful stupid not to have got his eyes open yet."

But afterwards they both by common consent avoided the subject. This was because each dreaded that the other might confirm a fear that was shaping itself in their minds.

It is probable that these two loved Stanislaus better than any one else loved him in

all the world. Certainly if his father cared more for him he did not take the trouble to show it, having seemingly washed his hands of the little fellow after turning him over to the school. It was partly his delightful trick of individualizing people in general, and his friends in particular, that had so endeared him to these two. "I al'us know when it 's you," he confided to Miss Lyman, as he played with her chatelaine, "'cause I hear vese tinkly fings coming way and away, 'fore you gits here." While to Miss Cynthia he said, "I al'us knows you by vat sweet smell." And often he surprised them by such remarks as "You don't like wainy days, do you, Miss Lyman? I heard you tell Miss Cyn-fee-ia" (he always had to break that difficult name into three syllables) "vat wainy days de-de-depwessed you —" He got the big word out after a struggle. "I fink," he added, "vat wainy days de-depwess me too." Which last remark was simply an extra flourish of politeness on his part. Nothing ever really depressed him, and when he said, "Miss

Cyn-fee-ia says s'e likes to laugh; I fink I like to laugh too," he came much nearer the truth. He did like to laugh, and he loved life and all it had to offer him. Each morning was a wonderful gift to him, and his days went by like a chain of golden beads strung together on a thread of delight.

It was because of his delight in life, and because they loved him, and could not bear that Fate should prick any of his rainbow bubbles, that both Miss Lyman and Miss Cynthia avoided the subject after they had once discovered what tragic little hope his mind was treasuring.

Miss Julia, however, was different. Her sensibilities did not lead her into by-paths of pathos; therefore, when she chanced upon Stanislaus's little secret, she joyfully proclaimed it.

"Well, if that little Stanislaus is n't the funniest child I ever *did* see!" she began one evening in the teachers' hall. "Why, if you 'll believe me, he thinks that children are like kittens and puppies, and are all born

blind, and after a while they get their eyes open just like cats and dogs. He thinks he is big enough now to have his eyes open 'most any day. Well, I did n't tell him any better, but I thought I 'd *die* laughing."

Here Miss Lyman and Miss Cynthia rose with one accord, and left the teachers' hall. Upstairs in Miss Lyman's room they faced each other.

"You knew?" Miss Cynthia half questioned, half asserted.

"How can I help knowing!" Miss Lyman cried passionately. "He 's *always* telling me what he 's going to do when 'I 'm big an' can see.' It *is n't* a foolish idea! It 's a perfectly natural one. Some one has told him about puppies and kittens, and of *course* he thought children were the same way. It is n't foolish, it 's —"

"You 've got to tell him the truth," Miss Cynthia interposed.

"I won't," Miss Lyman declared. "All his dreams and hopes are centered on that idea."

"If you don't tell him, the other boys

will find it out soon and laugh at him, and that will be worse."

"Well, why have *I* got to tell him? Why don't you?"

"He loves you best," Miss Cynthia evaded.

"I don't believe any one will have to tell him," Miss Lyman took her up, hopefully. "I believe it will just drop out of his mind as he gets older. He 'll just cease to believe it without any shock, without ever really knowing when he found out it was n't so."

But she reckoned without Mr. Grey. He, it appeared, had fixed a date for the great event.

"Gwey says," Stanislaus announced, "vat he got *his* eyes open ve day he was five, an' he dest bets I 'll get mine open ven too."

Thereafter, all his dreams and plays were inspired by the magic words, "When I 'm five an' can see." The sentence served as a mental spring-board to jump his imagination off into a world of wonder where he could see, "dest — dest as good as big folks," or "dest as good as Gwey."

Every day his fifth birthday drew nearer, and Miss Cynthia's eyes said, You 've got to tell; and every day Miss Lyman avoided them.

At last it was the day before his birthday. He waked with the words, "To-mowwow is my birfday," on his tongue, and scrambled out of bed, a little night-shirted figure of ecstasy. His dressing that morning — the putting on of his shoes, the scrubbing of his fingers, the rather uncertain brushing of his hair — all went off to the happy refrain of —

"To-mowwow is my birfday, my birfday, my birfday!"

Some deep wisdom kept him from letting the other boys suspect what Mr. Grey had promised for his birthday, but when he came to Miss Lyman that she might look him over before he went to school, he pulled her down close to whisper, "I 'm goin' to look at *you* ve very first one of all." And to seal the matter he deposited a kiss in the palm of her hand, and shut her fingers tight upon it.

"Keep vat till I come back," he commanded, and went jauntily off to school, where in all probability he made the same engaging promise to Miss Cynthia, and sealed it with the same token. But if he did, one may be certain he hid the token safe away in her hand. He was always shy about kisses, not being quite sure but that they might be visible. You could certainly feel the things, so why might n't they be seen as well, sticking right out on one's cheek for "sighted" people to stare at? For this reason, he refused them on his own account, "'cause vey might show"; and those that he gave were always bestowed in the palm of the hand, where the fingers could be closed hastily upon them.

Miss Lyman sat in the clothes room that morning, and sewed and waited. Her needle blurred, and her thread knotted, and the patches seemed more difficult than ever, and all because she had told herself that presently she must take a little boy up in her lap and shatter his dearest hope with truth. She had made up her mind that when he

came from school that morning she would have to tell him. Therefore she sat and sewed, her whole being tense for the sound of his footsteps. She knew just how he would come — with a sudden scamper up the steps outside. He always ran as soon as his fingers were sure of the rail, because much of his time he was an engine, "An' vats ve way twains come up steps." Then he would whisk around the corner, fumble an instant for the door-handle, and burst in upon her.

But after all, none of these sounds came. Instead, there was suddenly the trampling of grown-up feet, the rush of skirts, and Miss Cynthia threw the door wide.

"Oh, come — come quick!" she panted. "Stanny is hurt — He ran away — Oh! I *told* him to come straight to you! But he ran away down the road, and a motor — "

Together they sped down the long corridors to the hospital. They had brought Stanny there and laid him on one of the very clean little beds. Such a tiny crushed morsel of humanity in the center of the big

bare room! But his hand moved and he found Miss Lyman's chatelaine as she bent over him.

"I knowed you was comin' by ve tinkly fings," he whispered. Then — "I was dest playin' it was my birfday an' I could see. . . . Gwey said to. . . . Is you — is you goin' to punish me vis time?" he quavered.

"No, lovey, no — not this time," she faltered, for she had caught the look on the doctor's face.

"Gwey said he al'us dest barked an' barked at aut'mobiles. . . . Let me hold ve tinkly fings so's I will know you is vere." And by and by he murmured, "It 'll be my birfday soon — *weal* soon now, won't it?"

"Very, very soon now," she answered, and clinched her hand tight to keep her voice steady.

"Why," he said, his restless fingers chancing upon her clinched ones, "why, you is still got my kiss all tight in you' hand. I 'd fink it would be all melted by now." A little startled moan cut him short. "I hurts!" he cried. "Oh, I *hurts!*"

"Yes," she answered breathlessly, "Yes, my darling, it will hurt a little."

"Is it — is it 'cause my eyes is openin'?" he gasped.

"Yes, lovey, that 's the reason." Her hand held his tight. "But it won't hurt long."

"Gwey never — never said it would hurt like vis," he sobbed.

The doctor stooped down and made a tiny prick in the baby arm, and after a little Stanislaus lay still.

"He may be conscious again before the end," the doctor said, "but I hardly think it is likely."

He was not. He tossed a little, and murmured broken snatches of words, but he was too busy going along this new exciting path to turn back to the old ways, even to speak to his friends.

Miss Lyman sat beside him all through the bright afternoon, through the tender dusk, and through the dark. Late in the night, he stirred, flung his arms wide, and cried out with a little happy breath, —

"My *birfday!* It 's *come!*"

And by the time it was morning he had gone.

Miss Lyman closed the eyes that had opened so wide upon another world, drew up all the curtains that the room might be flooded with the dancing light of his birthday morning, said a little prayer, committing him to his angel, and stole softly away.

VII

MARKED FOR THE UNEXPECTED

LITTLE BENJAMIN ADAMS'S career at Lomax was unique. Indeed, the fame of it spread far beyond Lomax, to be eventually recorded in the general annals of the deaf; to arouse more than one educator; and to make several Boards of Control awake and take notice. From the very first the unexpected had marked him for its own. Even his coming to Lomax, the State school for deaf and blind children, had been in the nature of a surprise. His oldest brother, Christopher Adams, had been killed by a train. He was a big deaf boy, whose mother had kept him so long at home that when she finally consented to send him to school, his mind had been so long neglected, and he was so unhappy and bewildered by it all, that he was well-nigh unteachable. At last he had run away, and, fleeing desperately home along the rail-

road track, had been struck by a train and killed. It was then that Mrs. Adams, frantic with grief, had realized the terrible mistake she had made in keeping him from school, and, in an agony of tears and remorse, had suddenly revealed the existence of another deaf child and implored Mr. Lincoln, the Superintendent of Lomax, to take charge of him. This little boy was barely six, a handsome, sturdy little fellow, his mother's youngest, and enshrined in the very quick of her heart. The discovery that this grim mountain woman had been hiding another deaf child had come as an overwhelming surprise to Mr. Lincoln, and to have the child entrusted to him in spite of his brother's tragedy had touched him acutely.

"Madam," he had promised, looking at the bereft mother with her oldest son dead at her feet, "we will give this little boy the best education that Lomax can provide."

So we speak, little guessing the future. His going to Lomax did indeed lead to the opening of a wholly unexpected door for

Benny Adams, but it was not, as it chanced, the door of education.

As has been said, however, Fate had from the very beginning dedicated this small boy to the unexpected. From the first surprise of his coming to the last tragedy-fraught climax of his going, his career was punctuated by the unforeseen. It was his unexpectedness that made the other children give him the sign they did. Just at first Benny's small personality was hitched on to his brother's remembered one, and everybody thought of him as Christopher Adams's little brother, and viewed him, as it were, through the veil of Christopher's tragedy. In less than a week, however, he won a sign of his very own. It was the one for surprise, and is made in the sign language by circling the eye with the thumb and forefinger and then drawing them wide apart — literally an eye-opener. It can be made simply, or can be dramatized — as all the deaf children loved to do it — by opening the eyes very wide, starting back, and generally looking as surprised as possible. All the chil-

dren's fingers flew up involuntarily in this sign the day Benny's small figure was discovered astride the ridgepole of the highest building at school. From that sky-line he avalanched down the roof and brought up abruptly in the wide gutter at the edge, from which perilous position he was cleverly rescued by Red Bird, one of the blind boys, while an agonized company of teachers held their breath, and all the little deaf children scuttled about telling one another with excited fingers what a surprise it was to see Benny on the ridgepole. From that day, whenever any one made the sign for surprise and coupled it with the letter A — Benny's initial — every one knew that Benny Adams was being referred to. The whole world for him appeared to be stamped with a question mark. It was his oyster, the opening of which led him into a succession of surprising situations. His handsome, serious little face, while it often reflected other people's smiles, rarely originated one of its own. This was not because he was unhappy, but because he was determined to find out

all about everything, and consequently was too busy to waste time upon smiles or the lighter side of life. His investigations also kept several other people very busy. There was never any telling to what lengths they might lead him. In the absence of hearing and speech, sight, touch, taste, and smell are apt to be overworked. Taste was particularly so in Benny's case. When hand, eye, and nose failed to answer the questions that he could not voice, he never for one instant hesitated to employ tongue.

"What in the *world* will that little Benny Adams eat next!" Miss Evans wailed. She gave way to this distracted exclamation the day after she had received a tribute of roses. Very pink they were, very large, very long-stemmed. They decorated her desk all the morning, and shed an intoxicating perfume through the schoolroom. Alas! at recess they were left alone for a few minutes. When Miss Evans returned she found only ten roses where there had been twelve. That night Benny Adams was extremely ill. So ill in fact that the trained nurse administered cer-

tain cataclysmic doses, upon which crumpled rose leaves were returned to a waiting world. "But people don't *eat* roses!" Miss Evans protested when informed of the Jonah part her flowers had played.

"Well, Benny does," Mr. Lincoln retorted: "it 's his method of studying botany."

After that an edict went forth that anything which in the wildest stretch of imagination might be regarded as edible was to be strictly guarded from Benny Adams's tongue. Unfortunately, it was not possible for even the wildest imagination to foresee what that tongue might apply itself to. However, every teacher or matron did his or her best.

There was a general feeling that if anything happened to this little boy, following as it would upon his brother's death, and with that grim bereft mother back there in the mountains of Lupin County, it would be more than human nature could endure. Besides every one had fallen in love with him. From being his mother's little Ben-

jamin, he became indeed the little Benjamin for the whole school. He was one of those big-eyed, serious, endearing little children, comically intent upon whatever they are doing, handsome, sturdy, and independent, whom it is almost impossible not to squeeze. He was as well the youngest deaf child at school: all of which things, added as they were to the remembrance of his brother's tragedy, secured for him an unusual tenderness.

Miss Evans, his teacher, took an especial interest in him, and was much pleased when she found that he had, like some of the other children, a small amount of hearing. She came down to Mr. Lincoln's study to tell him about it.

"Of course," she said, "it is only a very little, but with the ear trumpet I can give him quite an idea of sound."

"Good!" cried Mr. Lincoln, "that will help him in learning to talk."

"I wonder," Miss Evans went on, "if the Board of Control would let us take him to Dr. Gordon. I can't help thinking that

he could suggest some exercises that might improve his hearing somewhat. As you say, every little bit is such a help in learning to speak, and I do so want to do all we can for the sake of his mother."

"I 'll write to the Board and see," Mr. Lincoln promised. "But you know we can't expect much from this new administration. They are trying to leave a record of economy behind them, and they 'll not spend an extra penny if they can help it."

"Well, you would n't think a rich State like ours would have to save money on *this* school, would you!" Miss Evans cried indignantly. "The Lord deliver deaf and blind children from politics!"

"Amen!" said Mr. Lincoln. "And while you 're praying," he added, "I wish you 'd ask that the Board of Control may be made to see the need of having Dr. Gordon in regular attendance here."

"I will," she promised heartily.

But perhaps if she had guessed what stretches of agonized terror would lead to the answering of that petition, Miss Evans

would not have promised her prayers so lightly.

There was, of course, a general practitioner in charge of the school, but Lomax was only a small village, and could boast no specialist of its own. It was Mr. Lincoln's earnest desire, therefore, that Dr. Gordon, a combined aurist and oculist living at Winston, a few hours away by rail, should pay weekly visits to the school so that the children's eyes and ears might be under expert supervision. Many of the scholars came from remote counties, and had never been examined by a specialist. Mr. Lincoln believed that proper treatment might in many cases slightly improve what sight or hearing was left, or might at least keep it from getting any worse. Moreover, there is nothing so valuable to a blind child as his hearing: nothing so valuable to a deaf one as sight. Therefore, the safeguarding of ears for the blind and of eyes for the deaf seemed to Mr. Lincoln a matter of the utmost importance. He could not, however, convince his Board of Control of this. The mem-

bers of it were for the most part political appointees who came and went with every new administration: who regarded their positions upon the Board merely as seats at the political pie-counter, and to whom conservation of eyesight and hearing was a matter of the utmost indifference. In cases of acute trouble Mr. Lincoln was authorized to take the children to Dr. Gordon, but as few of the cases were acute, and as Winston was a half-day's journey away and none of the children could go without a teacher or matron, the trip was not one to be lightly undertaken; the permission was therefore very far from meeting the medical need of the school. In answer to his letter in regard to Benny Adams, Mr. Lincoln received a curt refusal, and a request from Mr. Prouty, the head of the Board, who was feeling his political oats and liked to assert his authority, that the Superintendent would remember that he was managing a State school and not a hospital.

Roses and ridgepole, Benny's minor surprises, followed hard upon one another.

And then came a very alarming one. He fell ill. Indeed, he was so extremely ill for a short time that his parents had to be notified. The local practitioner pronounced it poisoning of some kind, which indeed was likely enough, as the trained nurse had found her medicine closet, which she always kept locked, broken open the day the little boy was taken ill. A box of iodoform had been spilled, and a bottle of wood alcohol uncorked. For a few hours the school held its breath, and then Benny, who was a sturdy little person, set his feet determinedly upon the highroad to recovery and was soon back again in school. Mrs. Adams, who during the child's illness had been almost distracted, stayed on a day or two after his recovery, coming to school every morning to see her little Benjamin at work. She became deeply interested in watching Miss Evans initiate the children into the mysteries of pronouncing *a*, *e*, *i*, *o*, *u*, and sometimes even *w*, and *y*: of seeing them read from the teacher's lips such words as "a sheep," "a cow," "a dog,"

and match the words with the right toy animal; or of seeing them put into action such simple commands as "hop," "sit down," "open the window," and so forth: and she cried constantly, "My Benny 's learnin', ain't he? He 's goin' to talk good as any of 'em, ain't he?" And each time Miss Evans assured her that he would.

Benny, indeed, was remarkably quick, showing a decided aptitude for lip-reading and articulation. Taking advantage of this quickness, Miss Evans drilled him secretly in some extra words just for the pleasure of seeing the happiness flash up in his mother's wistful face. On the day Mrs. Adams was leaving, an especial surprise awaited her. When she entered the schoolroom, Miss Evans made a sign to Benny, and he, with that quaintly serious air that always made one think he was carrying out a scientific experiment, rose from his little chair, and going over to his mother put his arms carefully around her, and said, "I love you."

He said the words with remarkable clearness, and Miss Evans hoped to have

her pains rewarded by an outburst of joy on the mother's part. Instead the latter's face went white, and disengaging herself from Benny, she almost ran out of the room, and all the little watching deaf children, who miss extremely little, told each other on their fingers that Benny's mother was crying.

Mrs. Adams returned in a moment, however, and apologized.

"You 'll have to excuse me for actin' so foolish," she said with pathetic dignity; "but if you 'd ever had a deef child that 's never said a word, you 'd understand how it — it kinder breaks you up when they first commence to talk."

Miss Evans did understand, she had taught deaf children long enough to be familiar with the emotion and excitement of bringing speech to birth.

"We 're going to make a splendid lip-reader of your little boy," she promised. "He is very quick, and besides he has a little hearing and that is always such a help."

"I knowed he could hear a little mite, —

he ain't right deef like his brother was, — but I did n't think it was enough to be any use," Mrs. Adams returned.

"Every scrap of hearing is of use," the other assured her eagerly. "Was he born deaf?" she went on, looking at the child's healthy little body which gave no evidence of any terrible disease of the past.

The mother nodded. "My first was deef — Chrissy, you know — an' we took him to a kind of a ear doctor, an' he said when they was born deef that way, there was n't nothin' to do for 'em. He said it ran in families, an' that skeered me, an' I looked an' looked to have another. But I had a whole parcel of children that was all right, so I kinder quit worryin' about it, and Benny he was 'most two years old 'fore it came to me that he was just like Chrissy." She paused, looking wistfully at the handsome, alert little fellow. "Seems like," she sighed, "I could 've stood it better if it had a-bin any of the others."

Mrs. Adams left Lomax very happy and relieved over Benny. But it was only a short

time after her departure that his teacher and matron became aware of a change in the little fellow. His engaging alertness began to fail. Gradually a veil seemed to be drawn between him and the outer world. He began to move slowly, and all his busy investigations ceased. There was no danger now of finding him on the ridgepole. Instead one found him huddled away in dark corners, and sometimes he was whimpering and putting his hand to his head as though in pain. He ceased to play with the other children, and his face, which had been so bright, assumed a dull and bewildered look. The doctor, a general practitioner, could find nothing the matter with him. His heart, his tongue, his temperature, all seemed to be normal, but he was not. He went from bad to worse, his bewildered little face taking on a stricken look, — the baffled, age-old look of suffering children, — and soon he ceased to play almost entirely.

"If he could only *tell* us what the trouble is," Miss Evans sighed.

But this, of course, is just what an untaught deaf-mute child cannot do.

"I shall send for his mother again," Mr. Lincoln announced. "The doctor says he is n't ill, but something is wrong, and I 'll trust her to find out what it is."

But they found out before Mrs. Adams came. It was Charlie Webster — "little old Webster" — who made the discovery. He was almost frantic over Benny whom he regarded as his particular charge, and constantly implored the nurse with urgent signs to do something. To put Benny to bed, to give him medicine, or to wrap up his throat. Charlie himself had once had a sore throat which had been greatly benefited by being wrapped up. Benny clung pathetically to his protector, and seemed not to want to let go of his hand. It was probably because he was with him so constantly that Charlie was the first to find out what the real trouble was. The morning of the day on which Mrs. Adams was expected, he came into Miss Evans's schoolroom with a distracted little face, and pointing at Benny, who was

clinging to him, made certain frantic signs. Miss Evans jumped to her feet, shaking her head in agonized denial. But in spite of herself her mind raced back over the past few days, remembering how Benny's activity had gradually ceased; how he clung now to Webster; and how his hand went constantly to his face in that bewildered gesture. Cupping her hand beneath his chin she stared down at him for a moment. Then, putting the boys aside, she fled down to Mr. Lincoln's study.

"Oh!" she gasped, "oh, Mr. Lincoln, Benny Adams, — you know we did n't know what the trouble was, — but now — "

"Yes?" Mr. Lincoln prompted her as she choked and stopped.

"He 's — he 's — Oh, he 's going blind."

There was an instant's silence while Mr. Lincoln stared rigidly down at his blotter.

"Webster found it out," Miss Evans struggled on in jerky sentences. "I don't know why we did n't guess before, — but his eyes *look* all right, — and then I think it has only reached an acute stage in the

last day. He — he keeps putting his hand to his face all the time, poor little mite! He does n't understand, and he 's — he 's trying to wipe the dark away. He 's going to be blind as well as deaf. That mother comes this afternoon, and I — I just *won't* be the one to tell her!" And Miss Evans broke down and cried.

Mr. Lincoln jumped for his hat. "I 'm off to telephone for Dr. Gordon," he said. "I wish to goodness he was in charge here — we might avoid such horrors then!"

At noon Mrs. Adams arrived. Mr. Lincoln met her at the station and told her what was feared for her child. The news crushed her. She fell to an absolute stricken silence. She did not weep or complain. She did not even accuse any one of neglecting Benny. The blow was too big, too overwhelming, to be expressed by the smallness of tears or vituperation. In her gray flimsy dress she looked like the gaunt shadow of a woman, and to all the remarks addressed to her, she answered in stunned monosyllables, "Yes, marm," "No, marm." She had been told

that the oculist would arrive the following morning, and all that afternoon she sat in the deaf boys' sitting-room, and either held her child in her arms or watched him questing slowly about in fitful efforts at play, while the veil of darkness that was descending so swiftly upon him seemed to wrap them both in a gray world apart. Once he ran into a table, and bewildered and frightened burst into tears. With a sharp sob, she leaped up and caught him close in her arms. Then for the first time she spoke.

"He 's been deef and dumb all his life, an' now he 's goin' to be blind," she said. She put her hand up to her eyes with a stunned gesture, while her mind searched painfully for words adequate to her bitterness. "It 's like —like God Hisself had took his fist an' hit me a awful lick in the face," she said at last.

"And that 's just the way she looks," Miss Evans shuddered to herself. "And," she added, "if things like this are going to happen here all because the Board of Control is too busy making a record of economy for its party to supply these children with

proper medical supervision, *I* for one am not going to stay."

It so happened — or God made it so happen — that those taking part in little Benjamin Adams's drama were all drawn together upon the Lomax stage for the last act. But, as is always the way in the great drama of life, none of the participants had the least idea how the play would end.

Mrs. Adams, of course, was there, and the doctor arrived the next morning, but, unexpectedly, there also got off the train with him Mr. Prouty, the head of the Board of Control. Mr. Prouty was a large man, inclined to corpulence, and more inclined to pomposity. As the head of the Board of Control, he believed it to be his duty to control, and he did so in deed and in truth. When he came to Lomax he controlled everybody, or tried to. He instructed the matrons how to matronize, the teachers how to teach, and the nurse how to nurse; and that they were all trained workers with years of experience at their backs, and that he had never in all his life looked after a

deaf or blind child for so much as a brief half-hour, did not disturb him in the least. He had obtained his present position by the divine right of political wire-pulling, to which right he had sold large portions of his soul. Some portions of it, however, were as yet unsold. In the game of politics he was cold and unscrupulous; but outside of that game his emotions were sometimes unexpectedly elemental and human.

The drop-light in Mr. Lincoln's study happened to be at a better angle for the doctor's examination than the one in the infirmary. Therefore they fitted up a little dark room around it with shawls and screens.

"Now, then, Mr. Lincoln," Mr. Prouty, who was at the desk by the window, said briskly, "I 'll just trouble you to go over these reports with me at once. My time, as you doubtless know, is of some value."

"Presently," said Mr. Lincoln, who was helping the doctor arrange a screen. "We are very anxious about one of the little deaf boys, and I can't think of anything else just now."

Mr. Prouty swung ponderously around from the desk. "Mr. Lincoln," he said, fitting his fat fingers together, "I should like to ask you a simple question."

"Certainly," Mr. Lincoln returned.

"Do you consider one small deaf child as more important than the head of the Board controlling this asylum?"

"Under the present circumstances I do," Mr. Lincoln retorted. "And may I request you to remember that Lomax is a school and not an asylum? You —" He broke off, and after a moment went on more quietly. "Mr. Prouty," he said, "you 've got a child, have n't you? I think I 've heard you speak of him."

In spite of himself, Mr. Prouty's heavy, scowling face relaxed a little. "We have," he admitted. And then, unable to resist the temptation, he burst out, "Say, you ought to see that kid! Greatest young one you ever laid your eyes on! Why, not more 'n a week ago" — he settled comfortably back in his chair — "Robert — an', mind you, he ain't seven yet — he —"

"Well," Mr. Lincoln broke in, "this little boy we 're worried about is n't seven either. But the difference between him and your child is, that added to his deafness he is losing his sight as well. We 've had to send for his mother. Benny is her youngest child, and she feels — well, I suppose she feels the way your wife would if that little Robert of yours was going to have blindness added to deafness. Only, perhaps she loves him even more because, not above three months ago, her eldest child, who was also deaf, was killed by the train. Ah, here they come," he added, as the nurse entered with Mrs. Adams and Benny.

Mrs. Adams was guiding Benny, one hand on his shoulder, the other clutching his small fingers fast. Her eyes went swiftly to the doctor's face and clung there in an agony of unspoken entreaty, as though his mere word would give her child sight or blindness. Benny moved timidly, groping his way, while his hand went constantly up trying pathetically to wipe the dark away. His blindness had increased with alarming

swiftness — it was evident enough now what the trouble was.

Mr. Prouty's eyes rested curiously on him for a moment; then they traveled up to the mother's face. But from there they fell away almost at once, and he began to fidget nervously with the papers in front of him.

"Now, then, little chap," the doctor said, drawing Benny between his knees. Catching a spark of light through his opthalmoscope he peered for a few intent moments into the child's eyes. Then he looked up. "Has he been ill lately?" he demanded.

"He was very ill a little while ago," Mr. Lincoln returned. "We thought he had been poisoned."

"Exactly," said the doctor. "Wood alcohol, or possibly iodoform. He 's almost lost the sight of both eyes in consequence."

Mr. Lincoln had just an instant in which to take the words home; to catch his breath; to wonder how the mother took it, but not to dare to look at her, before the doctor's encourging voice went on again.

"However," he said, "I have great hope

that this is a temporary condition which will pass off with time. In these cases of acute poisoning the sight sometimes clears up entirely. So you must n't worry too much," he added, smiling up kindly at Mrs. Adams.

She had no words with which to answer him, but she caught Benny fast and fell to kissing him over and over again in an ecstasy of relief. And it may here be said that the doctor's prognosis proved entirely correct; with time Benny's eyes did indeed return to all their old brightness.

"He 's a fine-looking little chap," the doctor continued. "How did he lose his hearing?"

He was talking a little against time, for now that the strain was over, Mrs. Adams was on the verge of a breakdown. She made an heroic effort, however, and controlled her voice sufficiently to answer, "He — he was born deef."

"But his teacher says he has some hearing," Mr. Lincoln said. "I wish you 'd have a look at his ears."

Dr. Gordon produced from his bag a

reflector-like thing which he adjusted on his forehead, and through which he proceeded to examine Benny's ear. For a moment he made a close scrutiny. Then he probed gently with an instrument.

"Halloa," he said, "what's this?" — and a minute pebble fell into his hand. Again the instrument went into the child's ear, and again a pebble came out. Working very carefully the doctor removed at last fifteen tiny pebbles from one ear and twelve from the other. Then he pushed the reflector back on his forehead with a little click, and at the small sound Benny nearly jumped out of his skin.

"Steady! Steady!" cried the doctor. "I'll have to put cotton in these newborn ears. Mrs. Adams," he said, "your child has perfectly normal hearing."

She looked at him for a wild, an unbelievable moment.

"He's goin' to hear? My baby's goin' to hear?" she gasped.

"Going to hear! He does hear this minute — look at him!"

Benny, his ears unsealed at last, was spinning in the direction of first one speaker and then the other, a mad, excited little teetotum, beside himself over the revelation of sound.

Dr. Gordon caught him, and began to safeguard his ears with cotton. "He must have stuffed these pebbles in as a baby," he said, "or some small brother or sister did it for him — the little scamp! And of course, having one deaf child you were afraid of having another, and so —"

But Mrs. Adams had stumbled to her feet. "He kin hear! He kin hear!" she screamed. "My baby kin hear! Oh, thank God! Oh —" She broke into a wild medley of ejaculations, thanksgiving, and tears. "He 'll be able to hear what his mammy says! He ain't goin' to be blind, an' he 'll talk — he 'll talk just like other folks! Oh, thank God! Thank God!"

Her own eyes full of tears, but smiling in spite of them, the nurse put her arm around the distracted mother, and patting her shoulder, drew her and Benny from the room.

Then the doctor turned on Mr. Lincoln. "Do you realize," he demanded furiously, "that just for the want of a half-hour's expert medical attention that child was being doomed to a life of deafness?"

"I do," Mr. Lincoln returned gravely. "And it's a tremendous confirmation of the belief I have always had of the necessity of having a specialist in charge of this school. In fact, I wrote to Mr. Prouty not more than two months ago about this very little chap, but I could not get him to see the advisability of an examination. This administration, you know," he said bitterly, "is trying to make a record of economy for its party, and of course under these circumstances deaf and blind children are apt to suffer."

The doctor whirled upon Mr. Prouty. He was a big blond. His face was scarlet now. A wave of fair hair stood up crest-like and furious upon his forehead tempest-tossed by the gale of his wrath.

"God has the hottest corner in hell saved for the dirty scoundrels who play political

games with afflicted children!" he cried, and shook his fist in the other's face.

Mr. Lincoln placed himself hastily between the two men, but curiously enough Mr. Prouty seemed hardly aware of the doctor's outburst. He rose to his feet, putting out his hands with a dazed, deprecatory gesture, and when he spoke it was in disjointed sentences, his mind hitting only the high places of his thoughts.

"Boys," he said, in a shaken voice, emotion playing havoc with his carefully acquired English, "I never seen er miracle before — That mother — Lord! Supposin' it had er been our little Robert! An' he *did* look kinder like him, too! Say" — he broke off, tapping Mr. Lincoln's chest with an impressive forefinger — "you git Dr. Gordon hitched up to this school just as quick as you know how, an' I 'll make it right with the Board."

THE END

The Riverside Press
CAMBRIDGE . MASSACHUSETTS
U . S . A

BOSTON PUBLIC LIBRARY
3 9999 10226 091 4